MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: FOR THE BARREL

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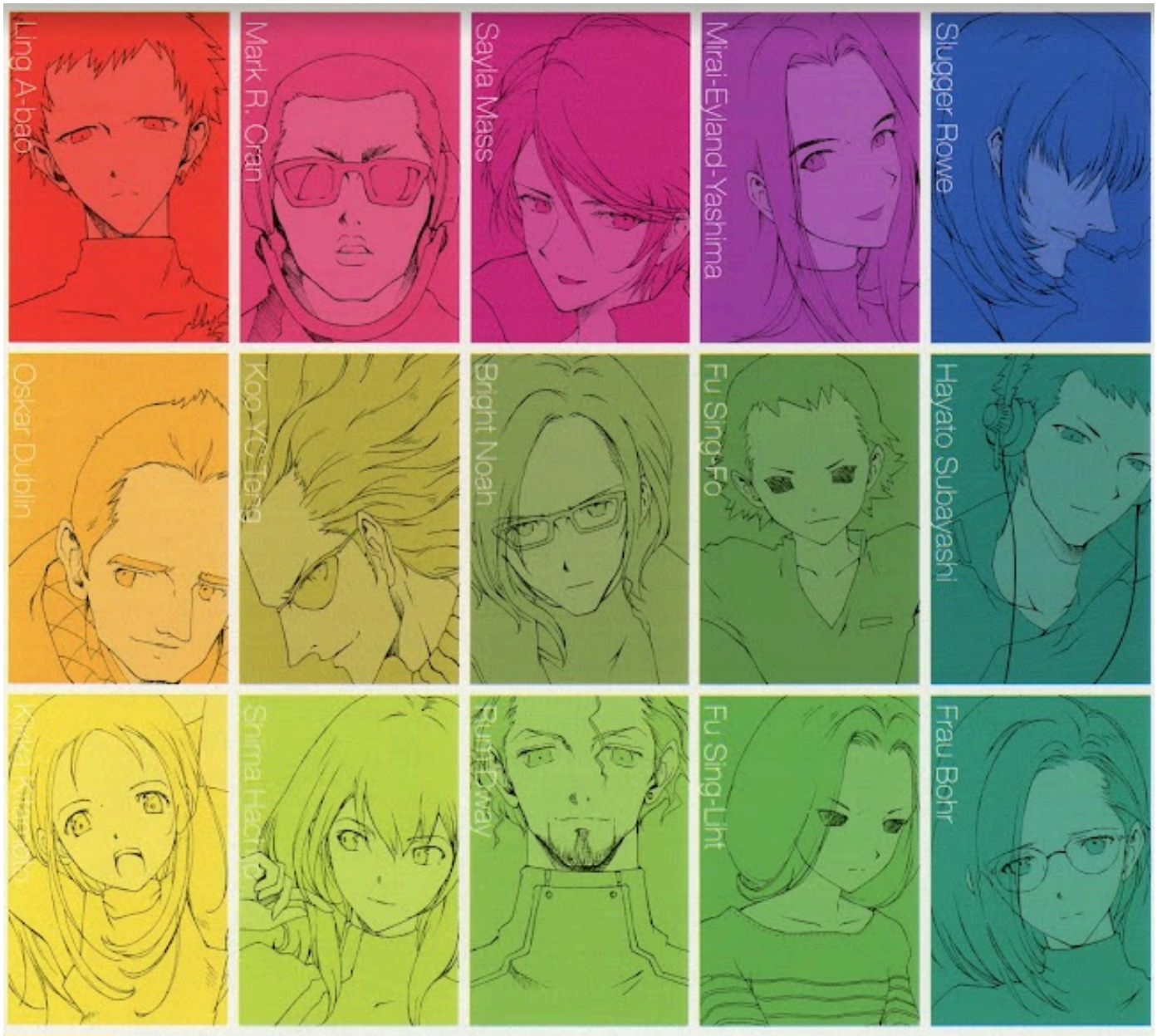
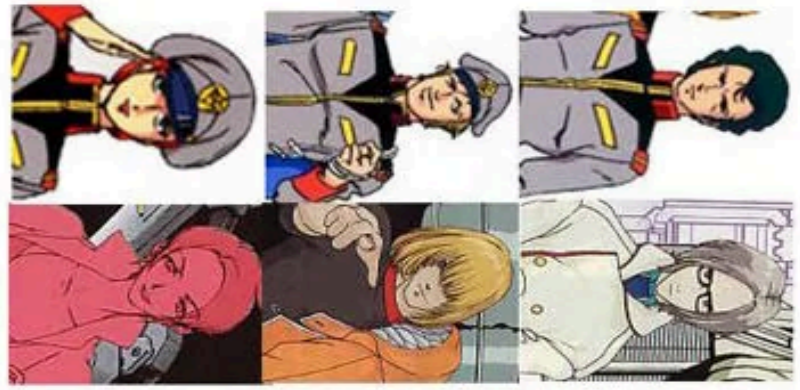

Ling A-bao
Mark R. Cran
Sayla Mass
Mirai-Eyland-Yashima
Slugger Rowe
Oskar Dublin
Koo-YC-Tera
Bright Noah
Fu Sing-Fo
Hayato Subayashi
Frau Bohr
Fu Sing-Lint



Foreword: Isn't It "G"?

Text by Kanou Arata

For the Barrel, studded with the well known names of *Gundam*.

Is this *Gundam*…or is it not?

Is this a remake…or a brand new story?

It appears that most people have no idea!

One more time, we'll try to present the ideas behind this story and explain exactly what *For the Barrel* is for you here.

-Ling A-Bao

A key that exists to guide the true protagonist through the world and the story—that is who Ling A-Bao is. In the main story he's said (or told) to be a number of things including "Streamer," but to put it most simply, he is "a rogue heretic born out of the universal age." He's not a new stage of human evolution or anything like that. His special powers make him a literal X-Man. A-Bao was employed (used) by bioinformation researcher Professor Lom Flanagan to formulate his theory of Streamers, the future of humanity. Flanagan took the data he gained from his sample A-Bao and molded it to fit his theory, often forcibly.

A-Bao subsequently became known as "The Prototype" by those in Flanagan's orbit. His memories were sealed away, and as a result he doesn't have any recollection of his time at the Flanagan Institute. Thanks to Forecast, his ability

to see just a few seconds of the future, he saw the coming battle and ran away from the army, gaining the robot "Gunboy Wilbur" with the objective of using it as a chance to upend the current era. His sidearm is a Chinese made Tokarev produced under license, commonly known as a "Black Star."

Searching for the Essence of *Gundam* through Reconstruction

Bright Noah, Sayla Mass, the White Base. Extremely familiar names to those of the *Gundam* generation. And possibly novel sounding to those unfamiliar with *First Gundam*. There is a story studded with these kinds of names. *For The Barrel*.

Looking at the August issue for the first time, there must have been many bewildered *Gundam* fans who said, "What the heck is this?" Even now there are still people that don't know what to make of it. We're going to explain it here one more time.

For The Barrel is a visual story put out by a new generation of four creators. You could think of them as "Tomino's children." The story has been developed using Tomino Yoshiyuki's series of novels *Mobile Suit Gundam 1–3* (published by Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko) as the basis. Rather than a simple novelization of the anime, the *Gundam* novels tell a powerful coming of age story. Among the hardcore fans, there are many that view the novels as the holy scriptures containing the crystallization of Director Tomino's ideology.

For The Barrel is an experiment taking those texts and attempting to reconstruct them using modern day visuals and sensibilities. As long as we are anime fans, *Gundam* will always have some level of influence over us. It's like asking, "What percent of your life is made up of *Gundam*?" For those kinds of people, they have no choice but to square off against *Gundam* head-on in order to discover their own originality. *Barrel* is that kind of work. To those of us influenced by *Gundam*, this is an enormous challenge to see if we can prove our own creativity. Also. The creators aren't the only ones being tested.

How *Barrel* will be read, how it will be received. Based on that, the question of "What *Gundam* means to us" is brought into relief.

Barrel began serialization as a combination of novel and imagery in the September issue (The first installment starts with A-Bao/Amuro's final moments as he's killed in battle!). The character sketch "World's End Barrel" will also be running in our sister magazine *Newtype.com*. On the internet side of things will be the database site "Charactions," as well as the English language only webpage bringing the appeal of *Barrel* overseas.

With *Barrel*, those that consumed *Gundam* are sending back a closing settlement of accounts. You can accept it or dismiss it, either option is fine. The only thing we ask is that you engage with it directly. And for those unfamiliar with *Gundam*, we hope that you treat it as a new work, while also being surprised that its origin comes from roughly twenty years ago.

-Casval Bailey

Making his first appearance as the sixteenth member of the *Pegasus*' crew, a greedy boy and the main character of this story. He's neither an Esper nor a Streamer. His ancestors came from the Caribbean, but his birthplace isn't clear. He leaves for space by himself and encounters A-Bao when the adrift *Pegasus* docks at a colony.

He longs to be brought into the war and joins the crew. There's probably no protagonist more detestable. He lives for the sake of quenching his own desires and a craving for the spotlight, and he'll step over many people to reach his goals. That goes for the *Pegasus* crew, A-Bao, and the war itself. A-Bao shares with him the vision of his death in order to convey his wishes to the next generation, but Casval ignores it, interested only in living for his own sake.

Like Hachijo Shima, he is a character that doesn't appear in the original novel, but he's not invented out of whole cloth either. *For The Barrel* doesn't have a single original character. Not Shima, and not Casval. His color is the gold of greed. Death lies the furthest away from him.

- Leroy Gilliam

One of the most important people to appear in *Barrel*, along with Casval Bailey. The tragedy that unfolds as A-Bao guides Leroy and Casval, two sides of the same coin forming the next generation, is one of the main themes of the story. A kind boy who harbors a secret dream of becoming a painter when he grows up, his misfortune starts upon meeting Casval. Leroy, the boy living a modest academic life at a school full of elites and Casval, a truant youth who dreams of nothing but setting off into the open sea and succeeding on his own. Despite coming from two different worlds, a friendship begins to form between the two. The arrival of the *Pegasus* alters their peaceful life. Captivated by A-Bao's resolve, he hopes to leave with him, but Casval's scheme brings an end to that dream. Several months later, Leroy joins the Anti-Earth Union Group's student army, and it's by his attack that A-Bao is shot down.

His role as the "young, unimportant pilot" in the original novel was kept as it was, while shifting the perspective. That's the Leroy of *For the Barrel*.

At this very moment, a collection of various ambitions and passions are debuting on the world stage in the form of *For The Barrel*. What will the anime world think of this rearrangement, this reconstruction of *Gundam*? How will they react? We asked creators active on the front lines of their industry: "What does *Gundam* mean to you, and what would you do if you were the one remaking it?"

The Remake of "G"

It's More Enjoyable to Watch a Total Transformation

-Mikimoto Haruhiko, Illustrator

In the past there would have been more resistance, I think. You had the feeling of wanting to preserve what you loved about the original *Gundam*. You don't have that sense of resistance now. If you take into account how the younger creators are trapped underneath *Gundam*, I think it's good even just as creative outlet, plus there's a possibility that something fresh and new comes out of it.

The new *Gundam* [movie trilogy] DVD release has changes to the voice acting and soundtrack right? *Gundam* fans might have said something like "That's unforgivable!" but I think it's fine. Of course, I want to have the originals too (laughs). Rather than simply improving the quality, I think it's interesting that Director Tomino thought about what parts of it he wanted to change when it came to the sound. It's the same when it comes to the visuals too. If there's a rough spot where you can better show Mr. Yasuhiko's feelings at the time by replacing it, I think that would make him happier. I'm the sort of person where, if you're going to change something, I want to see how it's been changed. It's the same way with *Barrel*, I want to see what interesting things come out of it.

So why not go ahead and make huge changes? If you're just dragging along the original *Gundam* in your story that sounds boring. If it's only a half-hearted copy, it'll just bring up memories of the original. You're more likely to end up

disappointed by its changes. In my opinion it's much better to make something completely different.

Speaking about visuals, the first time I saw it I thought I was looking at a page from [*The Five Star Stories*] (laughs). But as long as you keep drawing, your art is something that you'll get better at, and more and more of your own feelings will emerge. I'm looking forward to seeing that happen. If I had a job doing *Gundam*, even if I was told that I could go ahead and change Mr. Yasuhiko's art, I don't think I would have been able to draw something so radically different. That is to say, it's a good thing that they've been able to change it this much, I'm jealous.

Isn't it Better if it's not Gundam?

-Kawamori Shoji, Mechanical Designer

It doesn't really register that it's a remake, does it? If you're going all this way to redo it, the question of "to what degree should we change things" becomes an important one, but at that point I think it would just be better to make something completely original. Wouldn't it be better to wait at least a century if we're going to consign Mr. Tomino's novels to the classics? This still feels like connective tissue at this point.

With this robot, you can see it's internal frame prior to getting its exterior coverings, can't you? To me it looks too much like how an industrial robot would appear when working. As a machine I think it's interesting, and the characteristics aren't bad, but it's a weak point that all of the mecha have a similar appearance. It doesn't give off the feeling of being a warrior, or rather, the hero robot.

I'm not at all opposed to the idea of a remake, but I think it might have been for the best that professionals were intentionally kept out of this project. You have this many good ideas, it would be better off as an original. It feels like a waste.

The Ongoing Creation of *Gundam* Within Me

-Sano Hirotoshi, Robot Artisan [Sano's penname]

For me, "Gundam" is what was born out from many people's talents, using the TV series *Mobile Suit Gundam* as the foundation. But the *Gundam* novels were written by Mr. Tomino alone, and as such I'm afraid I consider them to be creative works that belong solely to him. With that in mind, if I'm going to talk about *Barrel*, unfortunately I think it's hard to create something on the same footing as the staff back then. Between when [*Gundam*] was broadcast and now, the circumstances for creating anime are much different. Plus, I think doing a remake or cover of something is difficult.

The reason is that even now I'm continuing to draw *Gundam*. It's current and continuously evolving. So when you say, "We're going to take this one thing that was made twenty years ago and do it with modern techniques," I really have no idea what that means. Even though it's been many years since the TV broadcast, the *Gundam* inside of me won't be relegated to the classics, as long as I'm still drawing.

Also, this is just my personal opinion as the Robot Artisan, but looking at the robot of *Barrel* I think it would be better to bring out its character and heroic nature more. If you did that I think it the support for it would be less fleeting and more universal.

What We Want to Inherit isn't the Shape of *Gundam*, but its Spirit

It's natural that there would be strong outcry. "This isn't a Gundam!" That's right. This isn't *Gundam*. This is something to come out of *Gundam*, but at the same time it doesn't exist within the original *Gundam*. It's based on *Gundam*, but it's searching for *Gundam*'s source. Through rearrangement and modernization, you conversely reveal the "Core of *Gundam*," that which

remains the same even if altered. We don't want to make *Gundam*. We want to reach its essence.

That's the reason the main mecha isn't named Gundam. The word "Gundam" doesn't appear once in the story. The main mecha is the Gunboy.

"Gunboy"…there should be people who recognize that name. The name of the Gundam while it was still in the planning stages. Going back to the early drafts to search for the root of *Gundam*, we hoped to use that as the starting point to create a new story.

There's no Yasuhiko Yoshikazu art here. There are no Okawara Kunio robots. There's no "Amuro, launching!" no "Because he was a kid," no "This is no Zaku!" and no "I can come see you at any time, Lalah." Does *Gundam* lose its value without those things? Absolutely not. In this way, we want to strip away the semiotics of *Gundam* to find what lies at its heart.

Please don't think of this as a thoughtless cover or a simple remake. We will spare every effort to avoid that. If we don't, we'll never be able to escape from the palm of Tomino Yoshiyuki and fly to taller and farther heights for as long as we live.

Show the Violence that's Within

-Maeda Mahiro, Director

My standpoint is purely, "What if the show bible back then had decided on this plain sort of head?" I think that's a fascinating experiment. If I was handling the remake myself, I'd want to use these clashing steel robots as extensions of the human body, and then depict the undeniable violence inside of humanity.

I'm Looking Forward to it as a New Work

-MAX Watanabe, Modeler

My love for *Gundam* includes its faults and missteps as well, so I don't particularly feel the need [for a remake]. Even without a polished production, it'll still nourish my spirit. With *Barrel*, the visuals are so different that it seems like it's already a different thing, doesn't it. There's nothing wrong with focusing on Mr. Tomino's novels as the basis, right?

Japan Birthed the Giant Hero

-Yasuda Akira, Designer

The way I see it, Ultraman was the hero that allowed the Japanese people to regain their confidence following the war, and with Gundam the Japanese, who believe that the spirit dwells within objects, created a hero with their own hands. I'd love to try and remake a *Gundam* that recreated the impact I felt with the original, but there would be a high probability that it would turn out as something that isn't *Gundam*, I think.

It Would be Fun Expanding the Interpretation

NOCCHI, Illustrator

Any story is going to have room for further explanation, and imagining this detail and that detail might be otaku-ish, but it's super fun. I think that's what a remake is all about. The original is rock-solid, but it's like, "if only there was something here like this it could be even more interesting!" As I thought, if it was me doing the remake I'd want to show more of the Flanagan Institute.

The Act of Challenging a Legend

-Sato Dai, Screenwriter

With a remake, you're challenging a legend aren't you? For me *Gundam* is my blood, my flesh and bones. If I were in charge of a remake, I'd take images from the few boring episodes of the series and make a short compilation film. Director Tada [Taku] (SMAP Gachaman commercials) would direct "Time, Be Still," Director Tsutsumi [Yukihiko] (Unsolved Cases) would do "Cucuruz Doan's Island" and Director Motohiro [Katsuyuki] (Bayside Shakedown) would be in charge of "A Wish of War Orphans."

The Polar Opposite of G Gundam

-Enokido Youji, Screenwriter

"'It's Gundam, so you know that at the end of the day it's just a robot anime' is that Tomino sort of brand (©Tsurumaki Kazuya)." They're trying to take that out of Gundam, aren't they? On the other hand, if you make something using that Tomino-ism alone you get *G Gundam*. I wonder if "Barrel" and *G* are what splits apart when you electrolyze the poles of *Gundam*.

If I was remaking it? Focusing on Char and Garma's school days seems like it would be interesting.

-GUNBOY-Wilbur (Ling A-Bao's machine)

With the arrival of the universal era the human body itself became a form of movement control. Using that effectiveness as a base a single technical showcase was built, the "Gump of Humachining," the ultimate humanoid robot (illustration on previous page). Due to problems stemming from its practicality in space as well as the versatility of its controls the Humachining Project ended, but its data went on to be used in many successors, beginning the development of the new model of humanoid robot "Machining Skin."

The Federation developed two different types of Machining Skin with the objective of selecting one. The first was named the "Gravity" of the "Gladiator Machining Skin" (G-M) series. The other was the "Gunboy" series. The blood of the Humachining Project was strong in the Gunboy, and consequently its handling was considered to be too peaky. It's a machine that excelled too much for its own good, and it was passed over for formal adoption. Four machines were built as part of the series, each named after one of the Wright siblings. A-Bao's is named after Wilbur, the third son.

-Shadowy Young Man

His details are cloaked in mystery. A former subordinate of Challia Bull, a member of the "Original Four" group of psychics. A young member of the social elite, he inherited a vast fortune while still in his teens. A half Esper who owns an enormous spaceship. From the training frisbees he carries it would seem that he can use his ability to move objects. At this time, that's all that's known about this character.

In the main story he gets called "Packdelia," but no one knows if that's his real name or just a nickname. However, without him you wouldn't be able to see the backbone of this story. Ling A-Bao, Professor Flanagan, the "Future Human Theory of Streamers" and Packdelia. These four keywords (plus one more!) are integral to creating the setting of *Barrel*. He's another character that doesn't

appear in the novels, but he can still be found somewhere in *Gundam*'s designs. An irreplaceable person on the same level as Casval and the others, but one whose full story is still under wraps.

For the Barrel Overseas

A "Betrayal" of the original TV series

-Since the information on the English webpage is still minimal, it appears overseas fans are starved for information about *Barrel*. On *Gundam* fan sites all over the world, people that are able to provide English translations of the information published in Japanese have suddenly become very popular. I want to highlight the fans reading the English translations of the *Gundam* novels right now (currently out of print). In recognition of their acumen I say, "Bravo!" (Sasaki Ake, *Newtype* English Website Coordinator)

-Among the hardcore American fans, the first reaction to *Barrel* was that of disbelief. Just like in Japan, there are still fans that view it as a betrayal of the original series. However there are many fans beginning to realize that it's an effort to "truthfully" represent the soul of the novels. Speaking for myself as well, I think that's the best way to rejuvenate the series for the next century. (Jonathan Clements, Author and Translator)

Sasaki Ake is attached to Bird Land, Inc. He is in charge of production coordination on the English *Newtype* webpage, and contributed to the English translation of character names and overseas research for *Barrel*.

Jonathan Clements is an author and translator. He also edits the magazine *Manga Max*, which introduces Japanese animation to English audiences. He has been awarded for his contributions to deepening the understanding of Japanese culture abroad.

-L-MESS (Lalah Sung's Custom Machine)

An experimental Streamer-use weapon built with the backing of the Flanagan Institute. Built around a high-speed, high-output ship engine and adding grandiose, streamlined fairings it boasts a level of elegance unthinkable in a weapon. Its refined lines are to maintain the emotional stability of its pilot, Lalah Sung; they've been fully designed according to her preferences in order to keep her placated. This is no truer anywhere else than in the cockpit, where the color, interior and furnishings all cater to Lalah's tastes. As a result it's extraordinarily spacious and filled with equipment that no one would associate with battlefield aesthetics.

The large extensions underneath are knocking ballast, which allow it to float quickly through space akin to a squid. The entire L-MESS functions as an antenna for the Psy-commu, and the psychic "Bit" weapons that use it as a carrier to launch from are capable of simultaneously attacking from multiple directions at once. Operation of the bits themselves is unstable, but the L-MESS's combat power still far exceeds any single Machining Skin.

-GUNBOY-Orville (Koo "YC" Deng's Machine)

The fourth Machining Skin built in the Gunboy series. After seeing signs they were falling behind in the Federation's competition, the development team took a test frame with some material differences to that of Wilbur's and equipped it with two recoilless rifles. Orville can be seen as a successor machine, improving Wilbur's design and increasing its firepower. The shoulders have been strengthened in order to mount its guns, and to accommodate the change the knocking function in the arms has been swapped out for high-density, articulated ballast. While this greatly diminishes overall mobility, its pilots have generally found the wilder aspects of Wilbur to be tamed, making it an easier machine to handle overall. To prioritize maintenance, much of the outer frame over the arms has been simplified or omitted. Additionally, the legs used are better suited for combat under gravity, and its characteristics on terrain have

been improved. The explosive round fired by its recoilless rifle has been shown to be effective both as an anti-ship weapon as well as against opponent Machining Skins.

The two prototypes carried by the *Pegasus* are referred to by their respective identification codes, C108 and C109. The unit pictured is C108, Koo "YC" Deng's machine. Its nickname is "Cannonboy."

"We love *Gundam,* so we want to try making *Gundam*!" This isn't something that comes from such a petty sentiment. We also aren't so presumptuous to think that we're doing this "for the sake of *Gundam*." However, we no longer think we can get anywhere on just the passion alone of "We love *Gundam*!" Using *Gundam* to accelerate, we want to find our way. *Barrel* exists for that reason.

The Contrast with ∀—You Can Affirm Everything Through Denial

If you use ∀ *Gundam* as a comparison, I think there's an interesting point to be made. Both ∀ and *Barrel* have been positioned on the world stage as creative works that aim to resurrect *Gundam* for the modern era. Also, the keyword here was "complete affirmation."

Everything related to *Gundam* [in ∀] is affirmed, and became included into legend as "historical fact." But…if you turn this complete affirmation around, isn't that just complete denial? All of the mobile suits from old *Gundam* series that appeared did so as "relics of the past." The act of excavating them was depicted as taboo, something like grave robbing. Since it's "complete affirmation," isn't ∀ the one that's burying all of *Gundam*?

On the other hand, *For The Barrel* takes what it wants from *Gundam*, fiddling around however it pleases. It appears to be a denial of the source material. But the reality is that by striping away all the easy to understand "Gundamness," *Barrel* shines a light on the "Truth" of *Gundam*. ∀ and *For The Barrel* are mutually complementary existences. They both have a twisted, uncontrollable love for *Gundam*. *Barrel* doesn't have that Gundamness. But it's exactly because of that that you should be able to discover the *Gundam* within it.

Foreword 2: G as Epic-Verse

-By Miles J. Litteral/Sasori Zero (SZ Labs LLC)

In previous editions, I didn't previously give a foreword of my own, allowing the authors and original translators to speak more, but if I could? I would say this

Mobile Suit Gundam: For The Barrel is an almost epic-esque alternative take of the Mobile Suit Gundam Novel Trilogy by Yoshiyuki Tomino that was originally serialized by NewType from 2000 - 2002. The Universal Century is completely reimagined from its earliest days.

It chronicles an alternative *White Base* known as the *Pegasus* in a both familiar and unfamiliar Universal Century where the Earth Federation is still a young republic and Zeon has been replaced by an Anti Earth Union Government (AEUG) that comprises both terrestrial nations and extra-terrestrial Barrels or Sides, the space colonies we know.

The dynamic stays true to the source material while often invoking the energy of past, and then future, gundam entries like *Zeta, Unicorn* and *Hathaway*. It is unafraid of referencing Tomino's works including *Ideon*, *Gaia Gear*, *Dunbine*, and more. Heck there's even an air of dark humor, even an easter egg to Mazinger Z! This novel feels like a complete homage to old Tomino.

Figures like Zeon Zum Deikum, Amuro Ray, Bright Noah, Flanagan Boon (as Lom who, fascinatingly, has a tinge of Dr. Chlust Moses in there too in this characterization), Challia Bull, Char, Sleggar, Sayla, the shows original cast all re-appear with totally new attitudes, in some cases names (Amuro is known as Ling A-Bao, a very obscure reference to the Hong Kong Release of Tomino's Novel in 1980) familiar goals, and a keen dynamic of angst that transforms individually, yet has a clear fear of systems and what they manufacture in people.

The inventory of the two sides are reimagined: Gunboy Wilbur (Gundam), Orville (Guncannon), Lorin (Guntank), G3, G-M, Mister Ball, Pegasus, Blondie (Zaku), Blondie 2 (Zaku-II), Dietrich D.O.M. (D.D.) and Dietrich D.O.M. B2 (D.D. B2) (Rick Dom and Rick Dom II respectively), L-MESS 1 - 3 (Elmeth), Musai, Muse form an array of beautifully reimagined units from across the One Year War that are featured.

There are also many new elements: Espers, Cybernetics, "The Original Four" Char Azna Bull, Pekdelia, The Bull Family,

I sincerely reject the idea that FTB is vague or needlessly weird. It has its own voice that sets it apart from anything that came before or after it and it was written for adults rather than a Saturday morning cartoon. What you are getting is raw characterization from the perspectives delivering it. It can be interpreted, but it is very direct in delivery.

It also is far truer to the Novel and Tomino than anime, that's just a lost cause to see otherwise, the "EF-AEUG War" is more like the struggles of the Ideon's crew than the bittersweet heroics of the original White Base.

Struggling against the AEUG, *Pegasus* attempts to cope with the realities of space combat, as well as the hidden reality behind the Gunboy Wilbur’s creation until AEUG successfully pushes them into a trial by fire to survive with an Earth rumored to become too weak to actually win or exploit the Pegasus’ success.

On the other side a Barrel 3 - 7 with an ever more uncertain future in the minds of humanity which become more and more entrenched in their views, myopically so.

Lom Flanagan wishes to prove a theory of NewTypes to the Packadelias (a recently made supporter of the AEUG, allowing them to step up their war against the Pegasus) in hope of pursuing a new vision. Interestingly this is presented entirely differently than Zeon who, while being in the story, is almost a different man altogether consumed with different philosophies.

Gaia Gear really does thematically hang over the setting giving an overture of individual development and a distrust for politics and conflict without cause. “Char” exists as a position, a role, yet Casval openly rejects the mantle. It’s not unlike Afranche who outright rejects Char’s mantle and instead endeavors for a quiet retirement away from the forever wars of Metatron and Maha. In terms of beats I would say the story most combines 0079 with a narrative vibe closer to Ideon or V Gundam.

To me, this story, in content, is not unlike the tale of Achilles. A-Bao is a man who struggles with destiny. Like the Greek hero he is plagued by word of a vision of his demise, yet he struggles against this fate due to his young age still he is keenly aware of the impact he must have on the future, for the better, with his actions.

The other ‘main’ characters also give me a vibe of past great literature: Casval reminds me most of a Tomino-esque character, like Afranche, while Sayla is a kind of Lady Macbeth trapped by desire so keen she can’t see the reality before her. Sayla has a pilot's uniform and thus fights alongside A-Bao, Hayato, Koo, and Slugger Law yet she never truly “finds” Casval’s legacy, Bailey doesn’t fit her vision.

Then you have Frau (Fraw) who is anything but a battlefield ally to A-Bao, yet somehow maintains the same degree of closeness that Amuro and Fraw did. Frankly they have a more intimate relationship in this story, and Sayla’s seduction of A-Bao, closely mirroring the end of the second MSG novel, demonstrates A-Bao’s progressive acceptance of the battlefield and his fate.

Yet it's not that Frau doesn’t struggle against the inevitable she also is given a Kafka like journey though, compared to Bailey, she resigns to the fate provided while Bailey rejects it outright, no matter what A-Bao says, closely reflecting Amuro and Char’s rejection of each other as we see leading up to *Char’s Counterattack* as we see in mainline canon. What fascinates me is despite their rejection of each other’s vision they still arrive at the same conclusion in this text: Find your own path, not a path written for you, no matter who says otherwise.

I really hope this translation is able to reach people as For The Barrel was never given the chance to really be told cohesively as a single experience, the authors mention this in my compilation's foreword which I urge people to read before Chapter 1.

FTB was always imagined as a magazine serial and for that reason its supplements can sometimes seem as illuminating to the story as the chapters themselves. There are three such supplements to this story, from most to least impactful: *Intermission*, *1984*, and *World End Barrel (W.E.B.)* that each set out to explain different elements of this story.

That feels true here; by itself the 17 chapter story lacks some critical connective tissue that would allow it the status of a true novel, even if Wikis out there remember it as such. The first supplement, *Intermission*, effectively gives the antagonist motivation and clearly illustrates the lead up to the EF-AEUG War (notice, this is never ever called the One Year War in the story and theres been a lot going on in the leadup to this one). It also provides the *audience,* not so much the *cast,* with critical context behind Casval (and thus Sayla) that greatly enhances the reading experience, especially in light of a certain missing element in W.E.B's original release and my compilation.

1984 provides visual adaptation and clarity to later chapters (Mainly Chapter 15 and 16, as well as the leadup to the final Chapter: 17.) That even further illustrates the disconnect between A-Bao views and Casvals's. It provides mainly context to various topics or fills "plot-holes" that could otherwise be potentially perceived in those chapters while further cementing the story's commitment to adapting the MSG Novels, not its Anime or Movie Trilogy. Its Four volumes that are each about 15 pages each, making for a breezy and trippy read (what a colorful manga!)

W.E.B. is most important for the aesthetic (Characters, Machining Skins, Ships like *Pegasus, Musai-class, and Muse.)* But this compilation novel offers the most important visuals. Though I will strive to include more, in later editions, as missed or requested.

For these reasons Intermission has been completely edited into the story (between Chapters 11 and 12) as aforementioned imperative to understanding the rise of the AEUG, and its leadership, is impossible to ignore. In this, they are very different from AEUG's presentation in *Zeta* as well as the motivations of multiple characters that otherwise comes off as opaque by themselves.

On the other hand, including Intermission gives real thematic breathing room to the Pegasus that would, otherwise, be suffocated by a general lack of context and understandably leads to much of the pacing issue complaints that have become attached to FTB over the years.

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, it unfortunately will always have an incomplete supplement, World End Barrel, due to its director getting sick during the original run and having to scrap their entry for Sayla, overall hurting her plotline later on in the tale, since she is presented as a mystery character who would be clarified in her WEB. This compilation also does not include WEB #5 about Slugger.

If I had to explain first I would say that TheIdeon no longer hosted the text, #5, at the time of this compilation. in theory I *could* read the scans he made available and translate the text for myself which I may just do, but secondly I think Slugger's chapters really speak for themselves and there is nothing that W.E.B. could clarify that you don't get straight from the horse's mouth.

My compilation includes links (in PDF format and Imgur in 1984's case) for these supplements, helping preserve the entire series as a cohesive experience.

It's not to say WEB isn't a useful supplement but compared to the previous two it would almost fit in with the rest of the Glossary rather than be a standalone piece, that being said the editing required has relegated this task to being set aside and so, in the future, it may also be included there in definitive glossary "profile sections" for each character, and a breakdown by category of what is covered as well as original author commentary through out.

Ironically *1984* is just not as critical to add in any sense, and I won't add it in here as it would only serve to bloat the story (due to most of it restating Ch 15 and 16) or would require truncating *1984* in a way that I wouldn't be okay with (basically editing in Vol 1 and Vol 4 to this compilation, ignoring Vol 2 and 3). Frankly, its ending is also far more *interpretive* than the text it adapts given below, notice its subtitle "No Future" yet being about Casval. You'll see what I mean, I suggest reading FTB first and approaching 1984 later to not confuse your viewing experience.

If I was ever able to release this in an official capacity I happily would, I would like to thank Barrel Works Team for their original take that wants to reach Gundam's essence while being its own take, TheIdeon and his team for their original translation, and NewType for their well-presented spreads. I really hope you all enjoy this!!

Original Concept: It Revives It! "GIPCE"

Staff

GICHI Ohtsuka

SHIGETO Koyama (UNDERSELL ltd.)

JUNJI Ohkubo (IZUMOJUKI co., ltd.)

MASAKI Apsy (F-FACE)

A Visual Story for a New Era. *GIPCE*, Start.

<Character A>

■Character Establishment

A 17-year-old second-generation space immigrant with an ashen skin tone. Despite his age, there is nothing youthful about his appearance. An introverted personality, extraordinary talents, and a congenital heresy that's clear to all. These things create an enormous break between him and his surroundings that's impossible to heal. Despite that, he must live in this world. Because he is a special kind of existence, known as "The Second Stage of Humanity." However, he attempts to escape from his mother ship, as if rejecting that label. This raises the curtain on a story filled with terrible frustrations. In addition to eight special abilities[1], he also possesses a ninth, known as the "Forbidden Power,"[2] but he has not yet reached the point where he can regulate his control over them. A meanspirited boy, dominated by his loneliness as a nonconformist and his juvenile libido. These two elements are combined and warped, creating a desire to kill.

■Character Design Explanation

The protagonist of this story. It was very difficult trying to figure out how to depict this character as overtly "heretical," and dozens of rough drafts were sent back and forth before arriving at the current design, which still retains a humanity to it despite the eccentricity. The following is not limited to this character alone, but as we move away from the traditional golden ratio, the key theme found in all of *GIPCE* is not about "simply creating something outlandish," but "discovering a completely new golden ratio, one that's never been seen before."

<Character B>

■Character Establishment

The woman knows that the boy only clings to her as an outlet for his own loneliness and sexual desire. Even so, she puts up with it, for her own sake. Although she understands the boy's heart, she only uses it for her own purposes. Aware of her own power to captivate men, she approaches the boy in a twisted act of self-defense. A strong woman, capable of nestling up to others to get what she needs. She herself has "nowhere she originally belongs," while her adoptive father's existence "makes going back unacceptable." And so she tells the young heretic, "Destroy the place where I should be." As the young man does nothing but go along with her formidable wiles, he is keenly aware of his own unpleasantness. At the same time, she's unsatisfied with men like that. Those are the kinds of contradictions inside her.

■Character Design Explanation

The concept was "feminine." How to make the character the embodiment of female physiology was both key to the design and the hardest part. Because the character is positioned between the real and unreal, as the surrounding characters were redone her design got revised as a result. The illustration published here shows a sense of lockout. She is held in the arms of the boy, but she doesn't allow for an emotional connection. I get nostalgic for the unique flavor of the cel (style) illustrations that you would frequently see in the anime magazines of the past.

■footnotes#1

1—Special Abilities

The main abilities are Empath (Understanding), Dive (Mutual Understanding), Intuition (Insight), Forecast (Prediction), and Authenticity (Truth), along with the three support types of Plus (Intrinsically Good), Minus (Intrinsically Bad), and Complex (Fixed Stereotype). An individual possessing all eight abilities will be recognized as "The Second Stage of Humanity." Along with these eight, there's also a ninth called the "Forbidden Power."

2—The Forbidden Power

This is a power that is found in very few, even among those belonging to the "Second Stage." The "Forbidden Power" is an existence that is separate from a person; to put it in easy to understand terms it's like a spiritual consciousness. It's something that's possible to identify using one's awareness, but actually controlling it takes a great deal of training.

<Character C>

■Character Establishment

A beautiful woman, with twinkling gray eyes and porcelain skin. She has an alluring charm and a way of speaking that slips into the male psychology. She has a happy-go-lucky personality and doesn't care what others might think of her, which can sometimes make her a target for criticism. She too possesses special abilities, but hers are not as powerful as Character D's, perhaps a result of her remaining humanity being too strong. Compared to the prominence of Empath (Understanding) and Dive (Mutual Understanding), her Forecast (Prediction) and Authenticity (Truth) abilities are extremely weak, and as a result she has a tendency to sink into states of heightened anxiety. Her usual laidback attitude can be seen as the opposite side of that. She senses she belongs with Character A and approaches him, but the war forces their paths to diverge.

■Character Design Explanation

During the early planning stages, when the flavor of the characters had yet to be found and it was just a cycle of trial and error, one breakthrough image was presented, and it was this image of Character C that would be the catalyst for building the foundation of all the other characters. There was a constant need to

show the reality of the ups and downs of female emotions, including generosity, without giving off an impression of simple sadism.

<Character D>

■Character Establishment

Slender limbs, an overly beautiful face, a purring, throaty laugh, and emerald green eyes. Her body has no discernable odor, it's almost as if this girl is a doll. She has experienced a harsh life having to sell herself but doesn't feel the least bit defiled, possibly thanks to her transcendent outlook, or maybe an enlarged maternal instinct. She was aware of her inborn abilities since childhood but unable to wield them. However, amidst the devastation of war she gains control. Those powers are a great relief to those protected by them, but a menace to the ones attacked. She has superior motor skills and reflexes, and her explosive power can no longer be called human. Just like Character A, she's another "Second Stage Human" possessing "The Forbidden Power."

■Character Design Explanation

Despite solidifying the general image in the early stages of the project, Character D's design was revised many times after that. Alterations to an image that are measured in millimeters tend to make you think, "the earlier design was better," and that this was all a waste (while in reality it wasn't), but this process allowed the outline of the character to come into sharper relief. I think her costume is a wonderful answer to the difficult request of "something strange but simple." By the way, Character D has a large role in unifying *GIPCE* as a whole, making more design changes possible in the future.

A Fusion of Gloss and Bass. The Breath of a New Era, *GIPCE*. (taken from the planning materials)

Introduction of "GIPCE"

The Reason We've Begun to Step Towards the Next Place

(The included text is based off the first draft of *GIPCE*, with broad corrections made for its inclusion in *G20*.)

As planned from the start, *G20*, which has continued to be published in a special format as a limited run, bi-monthly magazine, will reach its finale with the ninth issue (in other words, this one).

I wonder what the many readers who continued to purchase each volume are thinking as they read through this final issue. I'll be very happy if they feel that we were able to share some meaningful time together.

As for myself, as someone who knew about it from the first issue, I was more or less happy, thought it came to an end much too quickly, marveled that it lasted as long as it did, and it's like, how do I put it, I thought that I myself would have at least one or two suitable thoughts to mark the occasion, but it doesn't seem like I'm coming up with anything in particular. It's the feeling that the time has come. My cherished memories of meeting with Mr. O from ASCII and Koga Manabu at Shinjuku Tops to discuss preparations for the first issue seem like something from the distant past. That was during the summer, I'm pretty sure. As I think back, a memory of the dazzling bare feet of Ms. Aoshima Chiho, Koga's assistant, also pops into my head.

The first issue couldn't fit as many contributors as it does now, and we spent many hours of each day at Koga's office in Shibuya, which he had only just moved into. We drank a lot of alcohol. I have the feeling that many conversations stretched deep into the night, but I don't remember most of them. We've gotten a little older. That's the only fact of the matter.

Any level-headed retrospection covering the first issue through now is thwarted by the positions of the parties involved.

If I was going to intentionally disregard said position and talk, I'd say that despite the chaos of production staff changing midway through (in other words, the departure of Koga Manabu and myself), in the end (or rather, as a result), even when taking into consideration the numerous powerhouse publications that would show up after us, we seized the advantage that came with the peculiar concept of a "*Gundam* specialty magazine" without hesitation, and thanks to that we were able to utilize an exciting medium to achieve what I'd call some small measure of success. It's wildly irresponsible to say that so easily, but those are my honest feelings.

I once learned that a true magazine is a self-sustaining creature, and that all we do as editors is put reins on it, doing anything we can to hold on tight and keep the raging magazine under control as we try not to get thrown off. *G20* could be, in no small part, that sort of magazine. I think. It might be only natural to imagine that things might have gone better if our thinking had been stricter, but the reality may simply be that it was enough. The ones who did their best, holding on tight aren't those of us who quit part way through. It's the many staff members who carried things forward following Issue 3. I'm especially grateful to Mr. Inoue Masaki, who worked as assistant producer and editor. With both a good design sense and a high anime otaku make-up, those qualities alone made him as rare a find as Koga Manabu.

Magazines that end up controlled by its editors and writers are incredibly dull. I think that it's when the editors are easily pushed around that a magazine becomes interesting. When I was involved with *G20*, I probably had the wrong idea by thinking that I'd be able to "control the magazine." I can't deny that it's one of the things that held us back from making the leap forward. This too is surely nothing more than hindsight, but in terms of results, our decision to step down from the magazine became a major opportunity for the magazine to stand on its own. Again, I'm making a wildly irresponsible statement.

During the planning of the first issue, I'm pretty sure that I was the one who proposed a nine issue run (the original plan was twelve issues published every other month, in other words, a two-year length of time) and Koga Manabu and I worked together on the specific feature articles. Since this is the last issue, I thought I'd show you the topics we had.

1. RX-78
2. Zeon
3. Newtypes
4. Yasuhiko Yoshikazu
5. Spacenoids
6. Post Zeta/Another Gundam
7. Aquatic MS
8. RX-78 (second time)
9. Tomino Yoshiyuki

That was the list of features over nine issues. The plan changed many times, so I'm not sure when or at what stage this was decided, but I think that this was generally the balance I was looking for. The truth is that the features for Issues 5, 7, 8 and 9 got spun out into separate projects, but I have no objections to that at all. In fact, I get a great sense of freedom and openness from those former three issues.

For Issue 9 (this one), the plan was still to do a special feature on Tomino Yoshiyuki, as it had been from the beginning, and the offer was sent to the man himself, but his response was, "Give me a day to think about it," and in the end it was a no-go. The rejection could be taken as a negative, but the reasoning behind it was by no means so. In fact, it was positive. "This is already worth plenty as a fan book without needing me to appear." He was right. I was incredibly proud to have received such a reply.

Not because it came from Tomino Yoshiyuki, the father of *Gundam* (I can't help but feel a sense of incongruity when using an honorific with his name, so I'm omitting it).

When it comes to *Gundam*, there's a reason that I don't look at Tomino Yoshiyuki as someone special (I'm not talking about him as an individual, only as he relates to *Gundam*). I don't believe that *Gundam* grew to be so large based on the talents of one person alone, so in that sense, a message from Tomino Yoshiyuki wasn't going to bring me joy or sorrow, or cause me to weep tears of adoration. But normally, although the relationship ends with the producer (the original creator is fine, too) as the sender, the editor as the receiver, and then the magazine as the sender, from this statement a revolving relationship had been established where the magazine was the sender and the original creator was the receiver. I think that this is what an editor ought to be, and as such it's something I believe is worth taking pride in.

My motivation for starting *G20* was about settling accounts. That hasn't changed. The still rampant love towards *Gundam* and the overgrowth of information; the yet malformed thoughts and values of its fans. The tremendous desires and authority of its makers. I wanted to take all of these settlements and consume them at the speed of a periodical. There's a speed that only things intended for consumption can move at, and certain discussions that can only happen at that speed. I wanted to bring *Gundam* back up to that speed once again. And I wanted to bring it to that speed without any intervention from the plans and desires of the anime creators, only using the power of the recipients alone. I wanted to close out the *Gundam* 20th anniversary festivities with that attitude. And then settle everything so that we were left with a zero balance, either that or bring the things that possessed such a powerful intensity that they couldn't be liquidated to the forefront. I had the thought that by doing so, I'd find something like "the intrinsic good of *Gundam*." That was what "settling accounts" meant to me.

I feel that some of that has been fulfilled. Certainly, the celebrations marking the twenty years since *Gundam* was born were all about consuming *Gundam*'s existence. However, the growing wave of consumption was met by an increasing level of production the likes of which had never been seen before. The epidermis was torn off, a new layer was grafted on, and then it was torn off again. I've said multiple times that what got revealed by repeating this action was not only the scale of the industry, but people's own values. People's values, exposed to the open. A childish propensity to lay bare their childish object love. Even blind optimists would get fed up. I walked away from editing but continued to accept a few *Gundam*-related jobs before coming back, and that was what I strongly felt as I was finishing *G20* Issue 6. In the end, the "settlement" had resulted in leftovers, and our surplus appeared by no means benign. In other words, it was a year that made me more than aware of the scale of the disease spreading below the skin.

"To what degree is that meaningful for us?" "What comes after that?" With those thoughts in mind, my agitation over the present situation became cyclical.

However, over this past year I had detected a slight "odor." It was the smell of an even greater agitation. And the smell of the sight you'd see after its accomplishment. In the beginning I thought it was a foolhardy idea, but fortunately I also had the power to turn it into a realistic plan. I started to believe that it might be possible for this "odor" to take shape.

That was *GIPCE*, the project I've steadily been at work on since last summer.

At this point there's only a small amount of information we can make public, and unfortunately I'm not even able to currently announce how it will be developed in the future. It's still a possibility that the project might not go through, but even so, we decided to go ahead and publish a first look in the hopes of providing some good excitement suitable for the final issue of *G20*.

Koga Manabu's concept for *G20* was a "tribute magazine." By affirming it as a fan book, Tomino Yoshiyuki showed that the concept went unrealized. Why was it that it wasn't able to become a tribute magazine? The answer is that it lacked the creativity to simply pay tribute.

That's why *GIPCE* is my first and last tribute.

This is my greatest sense of responsibility.

However, responsibility must not be self-satisfaction. That's why it needs to be exciting, at any rate.

I won't talk any further about the concept behind *GIPCE*. It's not because the story doesn't need words. There's no need to be talkative when creating something. Let the work be the one to speak eloquently. That's what I think right now. Above all, it will be so interesting that the noise coming from its authors won't matter. So, I'm going to try my best.

I'm going to try and show you a new sort of spectacle.

Sorry in case things end up running aground.

-Gichi Ohtsuka

The Despair and Truth of an Imaginary World, the Nonconformists' Perceived Speed. (taken from the planning materials)

<Characters E and A>

■Character Establishment

The spaceship descends into a cold, soundless world. A humanoid weapon stands, its back to the venerated flock. And the figure of a boy, heading for the gray weapon. Amidst the quiet, something is about to begin. It's still unknown what that something is. A tale of destruction, a lamentation of the slaughtered, or… Is the weapon reflected in the boy's eyes terrifying, or thrilling? This one piece of concept art foreshadows the heartbeat about to arrive from the silence.

■Character Design Explanation

This *GIPCE* image board was made for *G20*. Koyama Shigeto came up with the composition and drew the character, and then it was combined with Okubo Junji's background. The theme was a humanoid weapon "that resembled a human, but with a shape that clearly wasn't human," and from over thirty drawings the final design was narrowed down by going back and forth between Ohtsuka and Okubo, making adjustments along the way. Adhering to the viewpoint that "mecha are nothing more than tools which support their world," something austere was conceived, something that didn't devour people. It's unclear "what" it is. At any rate, it was drawn simply for the sake of conveying the idea that "this is a world in which humanoid weapons exist," and it shouldn't even be taken as the final version. Originally it had been planned for it to be published in color, and a colored version was prepared, but as we were putting together the page layout we decided that it didn't fit with the overall tone, so we purposefully left it out this time.

STAFF OF “GIPCE”

■Asai Masaki

27 years old, born in Osaka. There’s probably no need to tell you about his career as a modelist at this point. The acclaim and runaway sales from the figures he produced last year not only shook the garage kit world, but left a considerable impact on the worlds of animation and comics as well. He did the majority of the setting research for *GIPCE*, and also came up with many unique ideas. With *GIPCE* he’s challenging new heights, showing off a remarkable creativity heretofore unseen by the public.

■Koyama Shigeto

24 years old, born in Tokyo. He formed the visual group “Black Man Computer” together with Nishijima Daisuke, a familiar name in *G20*, doing the character designs and animation for their independent movie *video!*, which caught people’s attention. After that, he established UNDERSELL ltd., along with Nishijima, Ohtsuka Gichi and others. He’s currently contributing visuals to the Nintendo 64DD title *Doshin the Giant: Kaiho Sensen Chibikko Chikko Daishugo* and the television drama *Multiple Personality Detective Psycho*, which is slated to air in the spring of 2000. He’s in charge of character designs for *GIPCE*.

■Okubo Junji

25 years old, born in Tokyo. Formerly attached to Fujiwara Kamui’s Studio 2B where he took part in many jobs. He cites “the staff members who take the illustrations of the great Hollywood SFX designers and refine and convert them into onscreen models,” as people that he admires. An up and coming designer who will clearly tell you that his goal is to be a “mecha designer.” He contributed to the feature articles of *G20* Issue 5 and 6, and drew the front cover of 8. He’s handling everything related to mechanical design for *GIPCE*.

Prologue : “FORECAST END–The Seer’s Death”

[Translator’s Note: The prologue is taken *in media res* from the events of the penultimate chapter of the third *Mobile Suit Gundam* novel written by Tomino, but presented in the narrative world of For The Barrel]

Growing up gazing at a sky that had been blocked out by walls, the boy was filled with unfocused emotions. He lived his life like a nomad, dreaming that one day he would be able to make his way on his own.

Several generations have passed since mankind first dreamt of immigrating to the stars. A half century has passed since that wish was fulfilled. Even for those that wished to remain among the fields, the fields were already a relic of a bygone age.

However, the boy was exceedingly powerless. He didn't have the faintest idea of his own strengths.

And then one day, he saw a white light. Believing that it would guide his path, the boy started to run.

The particle accelerator "Aura Road." The enormous habitats known as "Space Colonies." Humanoid weapons called "Machining Skins." Thanks to these three technical revolutions mankind had created their place among the stars.

The dawn arrives, and war begins.

The dawn arrives, and the boy is there.

A story for a new generation begins!

She suddenly shivered. It wasn't a regular chill. A second wave, and then a third attacked her in quick succession, clouding her senses. From her head to the nape of her neck. Her lips quivered and her knees wobbled as they ran through her body. She tried to speak, or to take a breath, but the dust in the garage ended up getting into her throat. She couldn't get rid of the irritation. Her heart began to beat faster. Thanks to the mixture of poor air quality and oil, her fine, silver hair touched against the floor, landing in a pool of dirty water. Even from the inside her dimmed consciousness, she could at least understand that this wasn't something as minor as a cold.

Before her was the forward-most operating base of the Earth Federation Space Forces, Luna II. Placed in geocentric orbit opposite the Moon, the asteroid Juno, with a maximum diameter of eighty kilometers, had been converted into a base that housed tens of thousands of military and civilian workers.

A few months prior, Frau Bohr, a refugee forced to flee her home, had managed to board the Federation's newest battleship *Pegasus* by chance, and following a difficult period spent adrift she was taken into Federation protection, eventually disembarking the *Pegasus* to be processed here at Luna II.

Without gravity, this asteroid wasn't designed for long term habitation, and with large parts of it taken up by military, manufacturing or mining operations the standard of living couldn't be called good by any sensible definition.

Unless you were comparing it to the Pegasus, she thought. Compared to being on the *Pegasus*, even this filthy air tasted fresher. If nothing else, she was finally free of that woman. Just being far away from that blind self-confidence was enough to make life a little easier.

That woman. The worst part about life adrift in space wasn't the nauseating smell aboard the ship, or even the crude remarks from the male crew members. It was her: Sayla Mass, a female member of the *Pegasus*'s crew. A cold woman, with shortly cropped gossamer blond hair, who always spoke as if nothing fazed her. She had an unconscious ability to carry herself with a confidence that had men melting in her hands. Frau hadn't been dealt an easy hand, and she'd developed quite a complex towards those who had.

On top of all that she had stolen away the first man Frau had slept with! So the jealousy, in addition to the sense of defeat as a fellow woman, had stayed with her even after she disembarked the *Pegasus*.

Even so…Frau pursed her lips. She had the feeling that the light of Sayla's self-confidence could even brighten the dark side of the moon. At times like that

Frau would be filled with self-loathing at her warped, ugly self, and even though Sayla was far, far away she would continue to detest the source of her suffering. In fact, right before that sudden onset of chills, Frau had sensed Sayla's confident light.

The entire south block of Luna II was devoted to refugee habitation, and the majority of the arriving refugees were given jobs involving logistical support. Similarly, Frau and some other refugees had been given a list of odd jobs, and on that day she was currently maintaining personal electric vehicles known as "Elecars," injecting cleaning oil into their cylinders. As she did so, she was keeping an eye on Fu Sing-Hak, Fu Sing-Lit and Kitamoto Kikka, three refugee children orphaned by the war. Frau held no love for the three children that watched her adoringly. Every time they'd affectionately call her "Mom," she could feel her dreams of romance and happiness slipping farther away from her.

If only these kids weren't here, if only someone else would babysit instead, I'm sure I could comfort a man just as well as Sayla! Kikka's strong, assertive eyes gazed up sweetly at her, and just as she began to feel her heart twist, she saw that light. For Fraw, it was something unbearable. "Again! There it is again!"

However, a second light had appeared, deep inside the first. It was white, and fast, unlike anything Frau had seen before.

"A-Bao! Ling A-Bao!" By the time she realized that the light belonged to the boy that was constantly on her mind, she had already said his name aloud. And then the light, far beyond Luna II's airspace, assailed her entire body.

□

Despite the gauges and instruments crowding his cramped cockpit, making it resemble some sort of laboratory, Ling A-Bao found himself remarkably calm.

His slow, rhythmic breathing echoed inside his helmet as he considered the little time he had left.

Only minutes earlier, Subayashi Hayato, a fellow member of the *Pegasus* crew, had been killed by an enemy "Machining Skin," a humanoid weapon. A beam gun mounted on its forearm had engulfed Hayato's C109 Gunboy Orville, the "Cannon Boy," in a storm of fire. The machine's skeletal frame was torn apart in an instant. Then, just as suddenly, the enemy broke off its attack and disappeared from sight.

In the vacuum, the light from the blast continued to spread, swirling outward. To A-Bao, the enormous ring of light seemed almost to blossom before him, making the weight of what had just happened all the more real.

There was no way he could have remained unaffected. He felt sadness, and regret. In the end, he and Hayato had never even had a proper conversation. And yet, without ever exchanging a word, the fires of war had gradually brought them closer.

A sudden heat burned in A-Bao's chest. The screams of Koo "YC" Deng, another Cannon Boy pilot from C108, still rang painfully in his ears.

But A-Bao quickly forced Hayato's death down inside himself. He processed it, accepted it, and pushed it away.

"If this is fate, then so be it. Right, Hayato?"

The Machining Skin G3, or "Ghost," had only just been completed when it was called upon to replace his heavily damaged Gunboy Wilbur. A-Bao's reaction time had been improving by the day, and the new Machining Skin was proving capable of keeping pace with him.

To take full advantage of a Machining Skin's mobility, its pilot was secured in a three-piece seat: a fixed section supporting the lower body, a movable seat

beneath the pilot that provided directional control, and another fixed section supporting the upper body.

This basic movement system was shared across the Gunboy series, but the Ghost's cockpit had been equipped with cutting-edge sensitivity processors designed to respond to the specialized abilities of its pilot.

And right now, they were responding perfectly to A-Bao's awakening in the wake of Hayato's death.

"You move pretty good, don't you! In the end I'm still just dancing in the palm of your hand. Isn't that right, Dad!?" He had completely forgotten about the dilemma of piloting the machine that his father had designed. At this moment, even something about that made him happy.

Just then!

There was a prickling sensation in the back of his brain, and an unformed picture of the future began to take shape in A-Bao's mind. This was Forecast, one of the abilities usable only by A-Bao and the select group of humanity who had awoken what people were calling Streamers.

"Damn it! Just because this is war doesn't mean anything goes!" A-Bao forcefully twisted his hips, which were locked to the lower swivel seat through his pilot suit. The Ghost spun around, racing away from Hayato's starburst. "*Pegasus*! This is A-Bao in Ghost! This area is being targeted by a laser attack! Everyone's going to end up dead if we don't escape now!"

However, that was as far as he got.

□

She awoke to find the children worriedly crowded around her.

“S’matter!?”
“You ‘kay!?”
“Mom, show us your face!”

Hearing their voices, she couldn’t help but tear up. These children, their skin supple and their bodies overflowing with vitality, cared enough to worry about her. It was the first time Frau had ever felt genuine affection for them. The feeling was almost painfully sweet.

“I’m sorry, Katz. Letz. Kikka… I couldn’t love you. Before, I only ever saw you as a burden.” There was so much more she wanted to apologize for.

I’m sorry, A-Bao. I couldn’t accept what you felt for me after you awakened, when I realized there was something special and different about you. Instead, I ran away from you.

Forgive me, A-Bao. I’ll never see you again.

Goodbye, my A-Bao.

The beam fired by the enemy Machining Skin struck the Ghost head-on.

A-Bao had already foreseen his own death. He was ready to meet it without flinching. And so he was ready to leave everything behind—all of himself. Everything he had been unable to accomplish.

“Pay close attention, everyone! This is the disappointing end of someone you believed was special! Everyone on this battlefield! Everyone in this region! That includes that boy, too!”

However,

However…

Chapter Dossier:

White Base-Class #3: Pegasus Jr.

The newly built third ship in the line of *White Base* class assault carriers, developed to serve as a key piece in Machining Skin-focused warfare. The shape is the same as the original *Pegasus* of namesake, but the solar sail on the bow has been replaced with a heatsink for its main armament: a mega particle cannon

G3 “Ghost”

A Machining Skin readied in place of the heavily damaged “Gunboy.” The G3 name refers to its weapon level, indicating that it’s the first Machining Skin with Rank 3 capabilities (battleship class). Its body color is gray, and it has the alias “Ghost.”

Frau Bohr

German. A lone civilian girl who was taken aboard the *Pegasus*. Dreams of becoming a fashion designer. Involved in a relationship with Ling A-Bao. Although she thinks of A-Bao frequently, ultimately she couldn’t accept his feelings, and she disembarked the *Pegasus* to be resettled at Luna II.

Chapter 1: “Play Child–The Bad Seeds”

“Person number one is over there, and number two there. Three and four, five, six and seven are here. Number eight… is over there with the others. Nine, ten, eleven and twelve are over here. Thirteen’s ahead, in front, and fourteen’s here. And person fifteen… I guess that’s me.”

This was the Pegasus, the first ship of the White Base class of carriers. The latest model of the assault carrier had been assigned a mission to receive the Earth Federation’s top-secret Gunboy series of prototype Machining Skins inside the space colony *Noah*. A-Bao had been assigned to the ship to participate in pilot training for the officially adopted “Gravity” Machining Skin.

A-Bao was convinced that the world was on the verge of upheaval. In the dim bedroom beside his, four other cadets snored, exhausted from day after day of practicing takeoffs and landings in their space fighters.

“This is really going to shake up this abnormal order.”

Staving off boredom, A-Bao let the slightly malevolent thought escape his lips.

“The way the world goes from here is going to be up to me, although it’s still nothing more than an opportunity that’s been provided.”

Even so, he thought. Even so, that was only if he could get away from the absurd verbal abuse of Instructor Ralv, a walking mass of complexes, and the questionable value of this endlessly repetitive training. A-Bao saw little point in training to use a space fighter from an era before the value of space combat had been proven.

Without thinking, he quietly released himself from his quarter’s Fiber Suit, the vacuum-sealed, wall-mounted, sleeping apparatus that clung tightly to his body. He took a few deep breaths, feeling his whole body relax as he slipped free. He felt even lighter than he had the first time he’d floated through the air.

With a sidelong glance at the bedroom full of sleeping cadets, he made his escape. He boarded Training Fighter Number 4 and deftly started it up. It was as if he were following a road he knew like the back of his hand.

He pulled the yoke and maneuvered toward Noah, the sole space colony built in Barrel 7.

“All that’s left is number sixteen.”

A-Bao searched for the tiny light.

He had last visited *Noah* roughly a year ago in 0079. This was where he had grown up. He tried to remember his childhood friend, Frau Bohr, but it was difficult to picture her while moving so quickly that inertia made it hard to breathe.

Then again, he wondered if speed was really the reason he couldn’t see her in his mind.

The thought was pushed aside by a sharp alert from the *Pegasus*. It rang inside his helmet, accompanied by a repeated warning from the bridge.

“It goes without saying that I’ll be back within twenty-four hours, whether I want to or not. No matter how advanced it is, without the Pegasus around, this thing’s just a heap.” responded A-Bao to *Pegasus.*

With the Sun to his right and the carrier he had just left behind him, crowned by its rays, the Pegasus really did look like the flying horse of myth. It wasn’t as though he had forgotten how much he hated the name, but he owed the ship more than he could say. He would stay by it until the very end.

Thinking that, he felt a small flicker of affection.

“I’ve got a little time before the *Pegasus* arrives at *Noah*. Now the only issue is sneaking in… Can I really get inside through the cargo hatch in the center block?”

The twinkling white light in the distance finally began to resolve into something more substantial. The enormous colony, three kilometers in diameter, drew closer with astonishing speed. Even the details of its walls could be made out clearly against the blackness of space.

A-Bao shifted his gaze from the forward monitor to the rangefinder.

If this had been a training exercise, his instructor—seated immediately behind him—would probably already have been furious.

“Quit relying on the digital rangefinder numbers!”

That was his instructor’s favorite saying.

“It’s not going to do you any good if there’s a power loss!”

“Even if you say that, it’s not worth dying in a crash for. If there’s even a one-in-a-million chance that my ‘Sight’ is wrong, I’d end up going back to *that* place with nothing but my brain kept alive…” A-Bao remembered their exchange.

After confirming that the rangefinder was displaying the correct distance to the colony, A-Bao turned his attention back to the monitor.

Aside from the scorch marks left behind on the innermost door, the multiple layers of the center block’s cargo hatch had opened without any further violence. A-Bao let out an exclamation of delight when he saw it.

He was also happy. Proud of that other self of his—the one that had been standing behind him for as long as he could remember, the one that allowed him to envision, almost in a flash, fragments of the reality yet to come.

Happy. Proud. And deeply grateful.

Even among the "Streamers," the new variation of humanity that had been discussed since the beginning of the Universal Century, A-Bao had manifested as a "Newtype" (Absolute Ability): someone possessed of even more exclusive powers, a separate and almost supernatural existence.

□

"Really, though… Why do these things always happen to me?"

As the Pegasus entered the colony, young Federation Ensign Bright Noah cursed his luck. Only a few minutes after A-Bao had entered *Noah*, an explosion rang out. A shockwave followed, and soon the colony was engulfed in chaos and white-hot flames.

Word of the classified *Gunboy* series had leaked.

Three *Blondies* had infiltrated the colony, launching a surprise attack to determine whether the intelligence was genuine and, if so, to capture the prototypes.

The Machining Skins had been born from the combination of the heavy-equipment Machining Workers used to build the colonies—specifically the *Quicksilver* model—and space combat fighters. Far more reliable than conventional space fighters, their sixteen-meter height also made them considerably harder to bring down.

A single *Blondie* could be as effective as a battleship. Caught completely unprepared, the Federation vessel was powerless against them, even with only one of the three.

The *Pegasus*, arriving in port behind A-Bao, had been caught in the surprise attack. Securing the Four Gunboys as quickly as possible was now imperative.

But the Pegasus had barely finished docking when the Blondies attacked, destroying much of its central bridge. Its regular crew had been killed, leaving the ship without a functioning chain of command.

“I never have any luck…”

As Bright took stock of his injured captain and the other survivors, he made his way toward the sub-bridge, grumbling all the while about his misfortune. For someone as concerned with cleanliness as Bright, merely stepping through pools of blood would normally have been unthinkable. Compared with his present distress, however, even that was nothing.

“How many times does this make? Captain after captain. I’m not here to take over. I couldn’t even cut it as captain of a basketball team!”

The injured Captain had summoned Bright and was straining to speak through a raspy voice.

“Even when everyone else was panicking, you kept your cool, didn’t you? You’re in good shape, a hundred and seventy centimeters tall and under seventy kilos. There’s no mistake. You’re the acting captain now.”

For Bright, that was the worst possible outcome.

The attack itself was one thing. But when he thought about the future of the Pegasus, his desire to escape only grew stronger.

“Resigning is looking more and more impossible…”

With a heavy sigh between complaints, he stepped onto the sub-bridge. He was surprised by how quiet it was compared with the voices of the wounded echoing through the rest of the ship’s halls.

Then again, a feeling of safety and comfort had never suited Bright’s personality in the first place.

The sub-bridge was cramped but functional. Two operators sat in crane-arm seats mounted at the center of the room, extending toward either side. The pair

looked almost like bystanders, and seeing them somehow made Bright feel even more dispirited.

Still, he decided to make at least some effort to play the role of acting captain. Reasoning that a captain was essentially supposed to behave like a friend of one's father, he spoke up.

"How are things outside? Do you know how things are going with the wounded?"

The two crew members simply stared at him. Bright's overly casual approach had left them wondering who, exactly, he was.

"Oh… I'm Bright Noah, an ensign. For the time being, I'll be your acting captain."

Bright intended the introduction to sound earnest, but his voice came out limp, making the deserted bridge feel even emptier.

"Mark R. Clan, but call me Marker. The other guy's Oscar Dublin. Pleased to serve with you, Acting Captain."

The operator on the left, the bespectacled Marker, turned his chair halfway around as he spoke. His hair was cropped so short that he could almost have been mistaken for a skinhead.

"Marker and Oscar. I hope we can all get along. You must be the two who received formal operator training?"

"Yes, sir. You could say that. Although I wouldn't say my grades were much to brag about."

"That's enough. Left to myself, I can't tell my right from my left. I'm counting on you. I mean it. If you two hadn't been here, who knows what we would have done?"

He glanced around the bridge.

“We’re in a hurry, so we’ll leave the detailed introductions for another time. Oscar, do you know the status of our precious cargo?”

Despite Bright’s question, Oscar didn't respond. He sat silently, fixated on the monitor above his lap without so much as turning around. His deep breaths rose and fell with his round body, and his lower lip quivered slightly, but otherwise he gave no indication of what was going through his mind.

Taking note of Oscar’s behavior, Bright tried again.

“Hey, Oscar. Do you know what happened?”

No response.

“Oscar? I’m talking to you.”

“U-uh, if you wanna know, look for yourself! U-uh, if you’re an ensign, doesn’t that mean you’re great? A-and if you’re so great, doesn’t that mean you’re smart? You’re smart because you’re an ensign. U-U-Uh, isn’t that right? Tell me that’s right, you son of a bitch! What are you staying quiet for? You don’t think I passed my training, do you? U-U-uh, you’re making fun of me too, aren’t you? U-u-u-uh! Say something, you bastard! Say anything and I’ll kill you!!!”

Bright understood what was happening with Oscar.

“I get it, I get it. No one’s doubting your abilities. I have plenty of faith in you.”

Oscar paused.

“Why? Hmm. I guess it’s a feeling. Intuition. Does that sound like I’m lying?”

Bright gave him a small smile.

“But compared to the title of acting captain, that’s something much more trustworthy. So, Oscar, can you tell me? What’s the situation like right now?”

Whether or not Bright’s efforts to defuse the situation had worked, the forward 3D display suddenly came to life, magnifying an image inside the bridge.

"First it was acting captain, and now I have to babysit? Can't everyone just knock it off, seriously… All of these problems go back to employing civilians in the military…"

Bright could only complain silently as Oscar continued to sit there in silence.

Beyond a wall of fire, the display clearly showed three enormous, flickering outlines. For Bright, it was as though he had drawn the Joker from the deck of cards, that was just his bad luck.

They were Machining Skins.

Blondies.

Vaguely humanoid in shape, their eerie movements were unmistakably nonhuman. But it was the single bright eye peering from each green killing machine that inspired unease and terror in the subconscious of anyone who looked upon them.

And yet Bright would have even more reason to curse his luck.

"Damn it!"

Marker, who had been sitting with his back turned, suddenly jumped to his feet and faced the 3D display.

"Captain! Acting Captain!"

"I see it. Who is it? Who started up *Wilbur*?!"

Bright stared at the shadow in the corner of the display and wondered if this might be the unluckiest day of his life.

That was the moment the white light awakened.

Chapter Dossier:

-Ling A-Bao

Chinese, born in Hong Kong. One of multiple Machining Skin pilot candidates attached to the *Pegasus*, the first in the line of the *White Base*-class ships. Holds the rank of Chief Petty Officer. Piloting the new machine Gunboy Wilbur, his skills have earned him the nickname "*White Speed*."

A second generation space immigrant, A-Bao has no memory of when he first arrived in space. The first migrants of the universal age, in other words, those moving to the First and Second Barrels, were the engineers and their families sent to focus on developing the colonies that would follow. In other words, they were pioneers. As an arms developer for the Earth Federation, A-Bao's father was transferred to space early on, and as A-Bao's 14th birthday approached he took A-Bao with him. When the 14 year old A-Bao showed a level of spatial perception that defied explanation, no one was more shocked than his father. However, starting around this time, A-Bao began to lose his memories over this two year period as if they had been cut out of his head. A-Bao would refer to this as "the cost of foresight".

A specious theory had begun to spread among the universal generation that a segment of the population was undergoing a variety of expansive evolutions. As one of these so-called "Streamers," A-Bao's specialization was in Forecast (future sight), one of the eight Streamer abilities. However, even the existence of Streamers was just a hypothesis at this point, and there was no way to actually prove A-Bao's abilities. Particularly when it came to Forecast, which seemed to be nothing more than delusion. And yet, after A-Bao had a prediction of his own death, it was a fact that he died in combat several months later.

There was already another popular rumor that there existed a ninth ability, possessed by only the strongest of the Streamers, but that the user had yet to fully awaken to their potential. As an aside, because the person who could access that ninth ability would be "an existence that surpassed the Streamers," they were given the name "High Streamer."

In Mandarin the name 嶺阿寶 would be read as Ling A'Bao, it is from the Cantonese translation for Amuro Ray's name during the original 0079 Novel's run in Hong Kong.

-Elebike

As there are a lot of strict regulations on air quality and resource usage in the space colonies, petroleum burning gasoline engines are generally prohibited for public use. For that reason, transportation inside the colonies is provided primarily by either railway or electric motor vehicles. The latter come as either the four wheeled Elecar variety, or the two wheeled "Elebikes" (electric powered motorcycles). As Elecar ownership is heavily taxed, most residents instead rely on Elebikes as their means of getting around. In the interest of self-reliance an elebike's power unit is easily user-serviceable, and many smaller manufacturers make their own models. A-Bao's elebike is a commercially available model that's been modified; it's capable of going far past the legal speed limit, reaching upwards of 100 kilometers an hour.

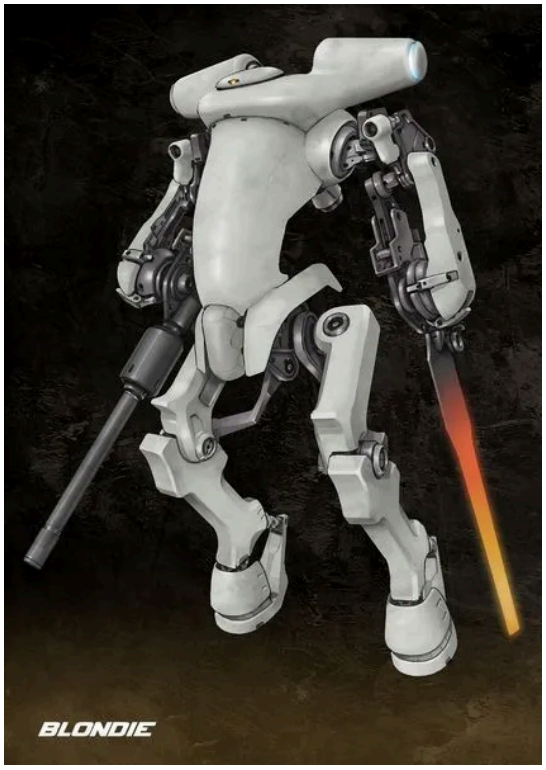
–Machining Worker: Built for space colony construction, these heavy machines marked an enormous technological leap forward and came in a variety of models, from workers with enormous arms designed for construction to those equipped to carry transport containers on their backs. However, the feature they all shared in common were the four limbs, which used "knocking movement," a method of equilibrium control. With knocking, the machine could move solely on electrical power. A generic term for any space-use heavy construction vehicle that demonstrates a certain level of mobility, the "Quicksilver" is one representative example.

–Machining Skin: With the addition of a small fusion reactor and thermonuclear rockets, a construction vehicle capable of wide scale devastation was created. As opposed to a space fighter which relies on single hit and run tactics, a machining skin has both the mobility of a machining worker combined with a speed approaching that of a fighter, allowing it to inflict more destruction as

well as retreat when necessary. It is far more reliable than a space fighter, and its sixteen meter height makes it difficult to capture. Even one unit alone is a match for a battleship, giving them enormous influence on the battlefield. The ultimate weapon, created from the fusion of fighter craft and worker.

–Knocking Movement: A popular name for the attitude control system in use from the very early days of the Universal Century. In space, where it's difficult to acquire a ready supply of propellant, electricity was used as the most stable source of motive power, together with the attitude regulation system known as Active Mass Balance Auto-Control (AMBAC). This made use of the impulse and reaction generated when moving a single portion of the craft's mass, allowing for attitude control without the use of a reaction wheel (or control moment gyroscope). There are varieties of AMBAC that utilize the movement and collisions of ballast mounted along a rail, or from swinging the machine's limbs, and because of the way these function the method came to be referred to as "knocking movement." Compared to relying on reaction wheels, knocking allowed for faster and more agile adjustments, and since entire portions of the craft worked as ballast it eliminated the space required for gyros, leading to the wider adoption of smaller scale spacecraft.

–Quicksilver: This machining worker was designed with modular equipment to fulfill a variety of roles, a reflection of the reality of Barrel 3, whose technical prowess far outweighed its national power. The Quicksilver is frequently seen in zero-g environments, although it's a given that it can operate inside colonies as well, where it's able to walk using its knocking-use limbs as legs. The ability to work in the asteroid belt and other places far removed from the colonies was a prerequisite of its design; propellant and battery capacity is greatly expanded to allow it to keep working for long periods of time, and it can carry up to three pilots. With the addition of a compact fusion reactor and thermonuclear rockets, it was transformed into the first machining skin, the "Blondie."



-Machining Skin “Blondie”

The first model of Machining Skin. Behind Blondie's development was the “Machining Worker.” Built for space colony construction, these heavy machines were an enormous technical leap and came in a variety of models, from workers with enormous arms designed for construction to those equipped to carry transport containers on their backs. However, the features they all shared in common were the four limbs, which used “knocking movement,” a method of equilibrium control that had been utilized in space from the very start of the universal era. With knocking, the worker could move solely on electrical power, without the need for a large store of propellant. Whether doing construction work or knocking, all that was required for power was the internal battery or an external connection, while a negligible amount of propellant was included for short distance travel. The assumption was that a worker would never be required to operate by itself, away from the colony. Using the exceptionally capable

model of worker “Quicksilver” as its base, the Blondies are the archetype of much Machining Skin design.

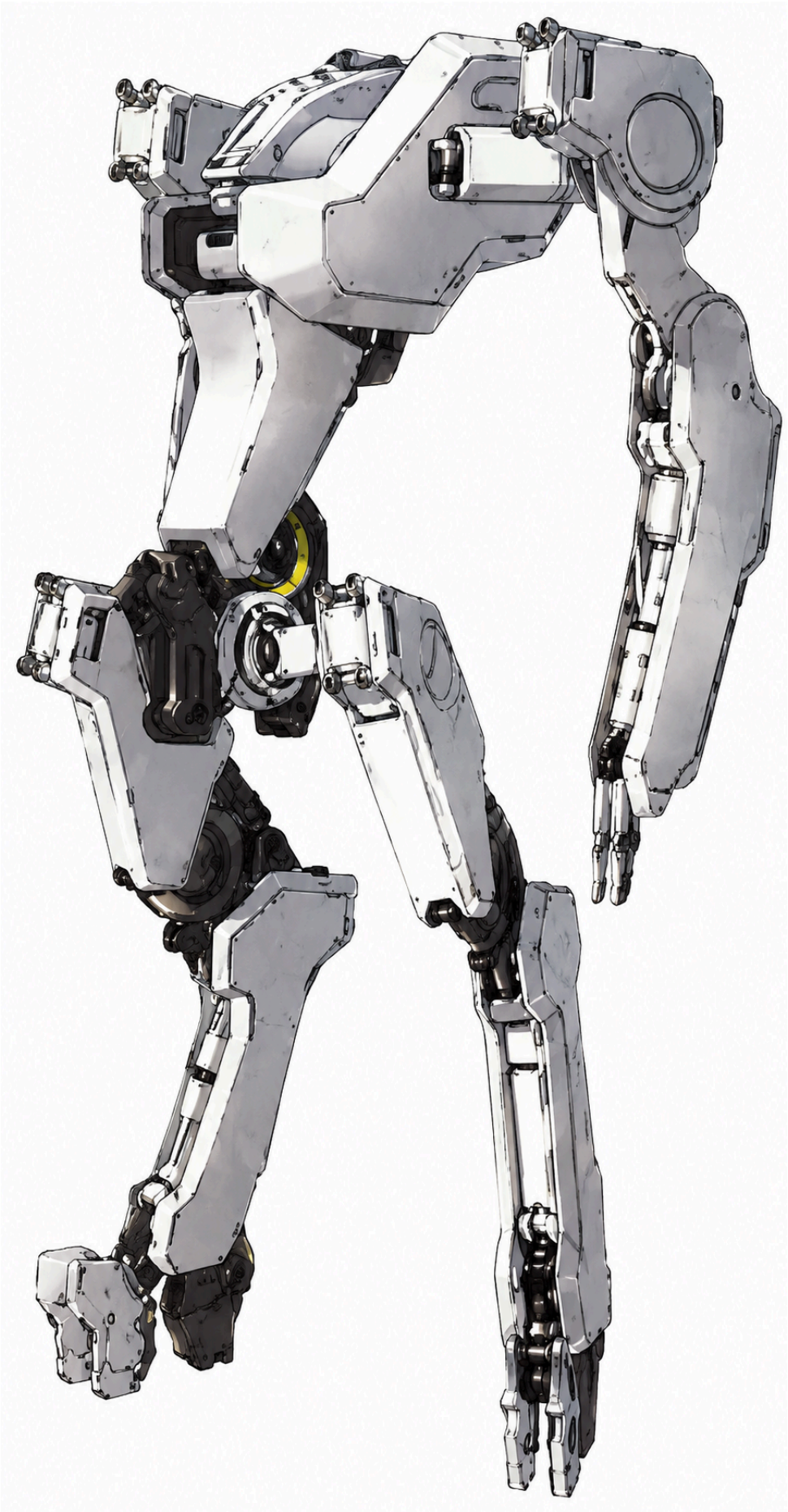
-Machining Skin “Gunboy Wilbur”

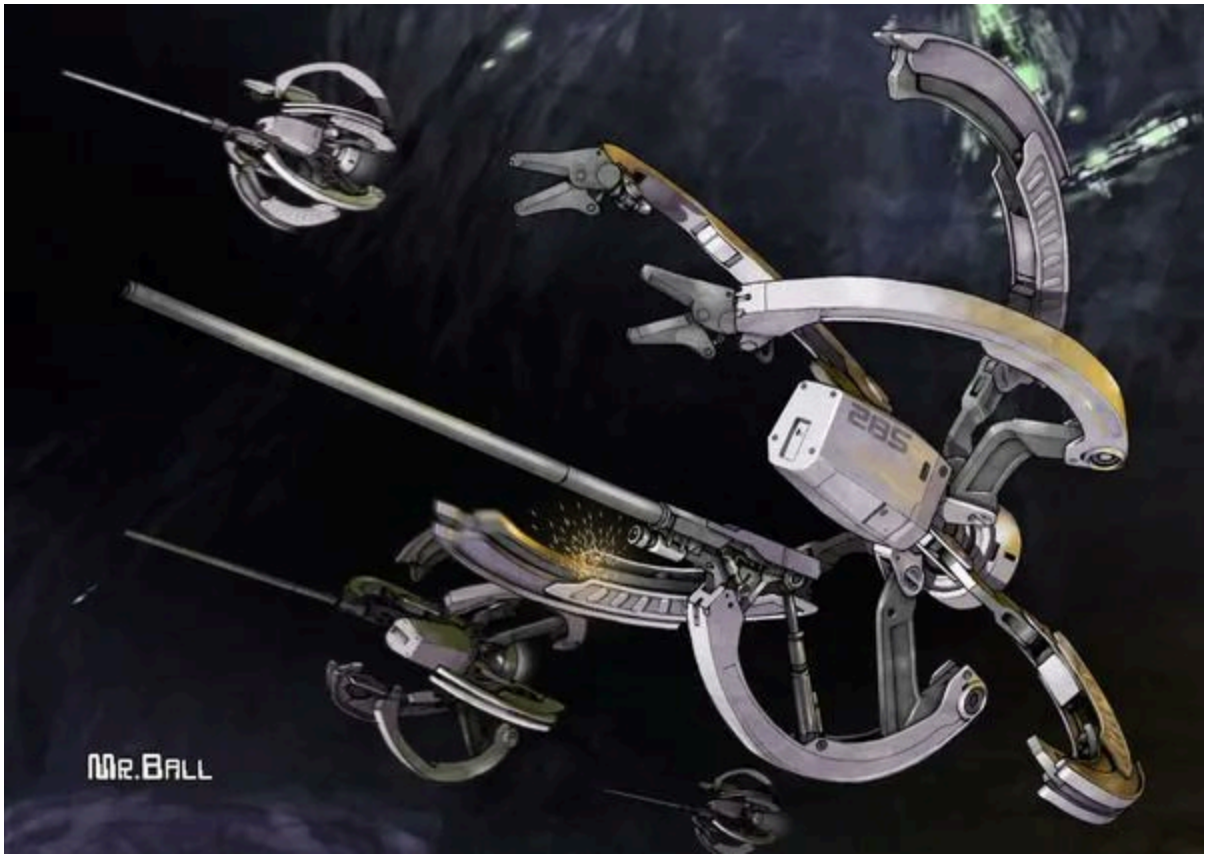
One of the prototype Machining Skins developed by the Earth Federation. This unit was damaged in development as it competed against the G-M Gravity, another Machining Skin designed for a fundamentally different doctrine. It emphasizes mobility in outer space, with each of its four limbs utilizing “Elan’s Pendulum,” a unique shape specially suited to knocking movement. In order to bring out the maximum potential of its maneuverability, it has been equipped with an original operating system that runs during both automated and manual control modes. From its drive system to its engine to its exterior, the Gunboy isn’t inferior to the Gravity when it comes to their commonalities, but it has been pre-tuned by an experienced pilot to focus entirely on combat in space, with no attention given to its performance under gravity unlike the G-M Series.

Obviously, this makes it unsuitable for pilots who were raised on Earth, and it was passed over to be the Federation's primary Machining Skin during evaluations. However, under capable hands its combat power still far outstrips the Blondie. During development, its nickname was "Albino." It has a sister unit called the Gunboy Orville, also referred to as the "Cannon Boy."

-G-M Gravity and Mister Ball

The other side to the Federation Forces' Machining Skin Project was the G-M series (Gladiator Machining skin), which would be adopted by the Federation after the results of the design competition with the Gunboy series MS. At present, the Gravity is the only model of the G-M series. Incidentally, the Blondies used against the Federation were developed independently by the manufacturer of the *Quicksilver*.

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Mr.Ball

Chapter 2: “Iron Giant–The Joyful Machine”

Inside C Block of the space colony Noah.

An unfamiliar explosion. A blanket of smoke. A sudden attack.

The utilities had gone offline as easily as if someone had flipped a switch. A terrible stench hung in the air. Something was climbing upward, almost as though it were skimming over a hill.

A single eye, seventy centimeters in diameter.

A brown-and-white chassis.

A Machining Skin. A *Blondie*.

The ground shook again and again. Instinctively, she flattened herself against the pavement. Something exploded. About a kilometer away, there was a commotion. A nearby trailer truck was on fire, belching black smoke. Gasoline.

A relic of the previous era.

It was a smell she hadn’t encountered since coming to space. An unpleasant—yet familiar—reminder of the city where she had grown up. It should have been revolting. No matter how much she detested it, though, there was something nostalgic about it.

“What a terrible sight…”

She looked out over the brightly lit artificial landscape. She couldn’t understand what was happening. She tried to remember what a normal day was supposed to look like.

Sayla Mass was in a hurry.

The overpass was still standing, barely. She needed to cross the blast zone ahead of her to reach the Pegasus. She had been taught that the residual radiation from

the destruction of a reactor aboard a Machining Skin or ship was nothing to worry about.

But that was only in relative terms.

Sayla knew that, too. Would she really be safe?

She was filled with uncertainty.

“I have to survive.”

A stubborn, confident light flashed in her eyes as she pressed onward.

□

“Who the hell is controlling that?!”

The unease and irritation building inside Bright had steadily grown into something worse. Gunboy *Wilbur*, their humanoid weapon, was moving.

This really was the unluckiest day of his life.

He pressed a hand against his pale jaw. **That was the white light.** The same sensation he'd felt when *Wilbur* awakened.

He stared daggers at the display. Hidden behind his glasses, his eyes seemed to ask a single question:

What idiot's handiwork is this!?

“They’re being too forceful. They didn’t even disconnect the supply tubes from the transport platform. Coolant is leaking everywhere! Isn’t the pilot being way too rough with it?”

Marker frowned.

Bright looked toward Oscar, who was still staring blankly at the miniature monitor over his lap. As usual, there was no way to tell what was going through his mind.

The three Blondies were heading toward *Wilbur*.

There was nothing the people in the sub-bridge could do but watch as they closed in on the newborn machine.

Their advance moved in a way that was almost comical. Their gait was unmistakably human, yet somehow wrong. They certainly didn't look as though they had come to celebrate Wilbur's awakening.

They approached cautiously, watching the newborn machine. Every movement was deliberate.

One Blondie moved ahead of the other two.

Behind them, smoke billowed over the ruins of the city.

Everyone in the sub-bridge understood the danger.

Was Wilbur going to be lost, too?

“That’s why!” Bright laughed derisively. It was the otaku in him coming through. “That’s why I didn’t want anything to do with a place that has the same name as mine!”

The cork had finally popped from the container he had kept sealed so tightly.

Looking back on the incident, Bright would later say:

“As I thought, I was lacking something fundamental when I took on the role of the ship’s acting captain. I didn’t have the ability to calmly observe the situation until the very end.”

Oscar had seen it.

It lasted only a moment—around fifteen seconds by measured time. He had caught it only because he had been staring fixedly at the monitor.

A long, thin rod of light.

The extended orange band warped the air around it, its tail crackling with energy.

Then the giant Machining Skin made a wild leap.

It cleaved through the clouds, artificial though they were, followed by a tremendous roar.

The enormous machine came crashing down onto the artificial landscape, crushing bodies beneath it. The ground split beneath its weight, sending a cloud of dust into the air.

It felt like an earthquake.

Then something brown and white came tumbling down.

A Blondie's arm.

The cockpit of the Wilbur was sealed behind a heavy hatch, forming a coffin-like enclosure called the "core block." It was an oppressive, terrifying place.

Its specialized seat was designed to synchronize the pilot's body with the machine, creating the sensation of floating.

Physical detachment.

Weightlessness.

Terror.

There was a faint smell of a brand-new machine.

And yes, terror!

Five flat-screen monitors—three in front and two behind—provided a view of the outside world. The cockpit's viewing angle was positioned as though the pilot were looking out through the machine's head.

The city's infrastructure had already ground to a halt.

Beside Wilbur lay the wreckage of one of its destroyed siblings: the red-breasted Gunboy *Lorin*.

That Blondie's severed arm lay to the ground.

The power of the Close Combat Type Continual Focus Banded Beam Weapon—or, more simply, a Beam Saber—was far greater than A-Bao had expected. Exposed wires in the Blondie's arm shorted in a shower of sparks while oil spurted from ruptured hydraulic lines.

It was an astonishing sight, almost as though a human arm had been severed.

A-Bao tapped a clear red key on the caster.

REC.

Recording to visual memory.

His emotions poured into the youngest of the Gunboys, *Wilbur*, so newly born that A-Bao had not even had time to switch on its interior lights.

He turned toward the Blondie, which still stood frozen. Its confusion at Wilbur's activation was obvious. Quickly, the one-armed machine began to retreat.

There was no time.

Alarms were going off inside A-Bao's head.

Who knows when another attack is coming? You're in danger. Hurry! If they get you, it's all over. Those bastards are out to kill you!

There was enough battery power left in the Beam Saber for only one more use.

Fifteen seconds.

After that, the only apparent weapons were the Vulcan cannons in Wilbur's head, which carried eighty rounds—enough for two bursts at most.

The warnings wouldn't stop.

Move! You're going to get shot! They want to violate you!

The alarms grew louder.

A-Bao gritted his teeth. His ally still hadn't arrived.

Even so, there were plenty of things he needed Wilbur to do. And even without everything else going on, he had forced the machine awake. Wilbur was being an extremely fussy baby.

He needed to coax it. To earn its trust.

At the very least, he had to get it to expel the gas building up inside its nozzles.

A-Bao stroked the interior walls of the cockpit.

I know all about you. Even more than the engineers who were working on you not long ago. I even know how selfish you can be.

You can move, right? That's a good boy.

There are three Blondies. We have two hours to go get them. Even escaping comes at a heavy price. I want to leave enough time to incinerate the other Orvilles after this.

Sweetly. Gently.

He spoke as though he were talking to a child who had lashed out in fear of its own power.

Like a mother would.

Hurry up. You're in danger!

The warnings continued.

He tried to refocus his attention. He could feel fatigue clinging to his body. It was becoming difficult. Exhaustion and drowsiness were attacking A-Bao from both sides, his consciousness on the verge of shutting down.

It's always like this. These attacks always come at the most critical times.

Even though I have no intention of falling asleep here!

It wasn't that he was unused to artificial gravity. Right now, the only sense of gravity he could feel came from “down there,” as his blood was pulled toward his lower body. His feet, locked into the clog-like pedals by his suit, had only just begun to tingle.

The effort that had brought A-Bao this far was slowly being eroded by fatigue. He was doing everything he could just to keep his eyes open.

The warnings were louder than ever.

Hurry up! What are you wasting time for? There's danger! Danger!

He thought of Fraw, the German girl he had known since childhood.

He couldn't remember anything.

He tried to visualize her body.

That came easily.

Fraw's blouse. The swell of her breasts. The sensation of caressing her firm body. He could see her pleading eyes in the back of his mind, eyes that had always been so good at ordering him around.

Trapped inside his pilot suit, his body responded with painful intensity.

That pushed aside his weariness, if only slightly.

Frau slept with me, and I made her into a woman.

It felt as though something inside his body were boiling.

His sudden vigor gave him the strength he needed. A-Bao stomped down on both foot pedals.

The nuclear reactor mounted behind the core block—a delicate, gravity-independent, miniaturized fusion reactor—roared to life.

In an instant, its power output went into the red.

Heated gas began to regurgitate from the exhaust nozzles back into the cockpit, circulating through the ventilation system. A-Bao could feel his consciousness expanding, as though it were resonating with the swirling gas.

It's fine. The two of us can handle it.

Let's go show them you and I exist.

I'll pull the trigger—the one that will shake up the world!

Let's hear you howl! Use your newborn cries to smash through this cramped barrel!

He shook off the warnings.

He was being fired upon.

One of the Blondies was using the projectile-type boring machine—a machine gun, in other words—mounted on its arm, sweeping a wide line of fire across the area.

A-Bao could feel the blast pressure, but he didn't take his feet off the pedals.

The exhaust gas couldn't escape.

The output numbers were redlining.

One of the 120mm shells struck the charging Wilbur squarely.

The entire cockpit buckled under the impact.

It had detonated at point-blank range.

The monitors flickered with fluorescent light as they registered the hit. Calculations raced across them, keeping the machine upright.

For one-point-two seconds, everything froze.

A-Bao had no control over Wilbur.

Everything went black.

Darkness.

A-Vao lived by working backward from his future, compensating for his past.

He had no memories of being here three years earlier in 0076.

The loss of those memories had accompanied the awakening of the eighth Streamer ability: **Forecast**.

“The price to pay for foresight,” he called it.

But that wasn't the only cost.

From time to time, A-Bao blacked out.

There were many things that could trigger it: stress, being pushed beyond his limits, and, most of all, when it mattered most.

In other words, right now.

A-Bao’s thoughts were forcibly interrupted. It was as though his consciousness had been surgically cut away from his body.

His body kept moving without him.

His feet pressed down on the pedals again.

Another impact.

The exhaust gas was released.

Adjusting the undulating frame of the core block, Wilbur moved downward, exposing itself to open space. The nozzles on the sub-generator hissed, and fire erupted from the large thrusters behind them.

A-Bao's body twisted the movable portion of his seat hard to the right.

Wilbur leapt into the air.

The Blondie was pointing its gun at an empty space.

Too late.

That thin light.

The crackling tip.

The orange beam.

As the Blondie raised its gun toward the sky, Wilbur's Beam Saber came down on it from above.

The blow struck true.

A-Bao’s detached consciousness trembled as it sensed what had happened instinctively.

He understood why the three Blondies had infiltrated enemy territory, going so far as to launch a surprise attack.

It had nothing to do with ambition.

He wasn't sure what their exact motives were, with the Gunboy’s now secure, but he knew one thing for certain: **they had come prepared to die.**

People with that kind of resolve could do things ordinary people could never imagine.

As Wilbur jumped, the first Blondie fired into the air.

The second had already lost its means of attack when its arm was severed.

That left the third machine—the one furthest to the rear.

Something about it was wrong.

The third Blondie raised its gun and opened fire.

It was aiming at the one-armed Blondie.

Friendly fire?

It happened only seconds before Wilbur's Beam Saber cut through the first Blondie.

The 120mm rounds struck the target directly in its reactor.

The metal hull swelled, then burst apart, incandescent fire shooting in every direction.

A pounding rang inside A-Bao's head.

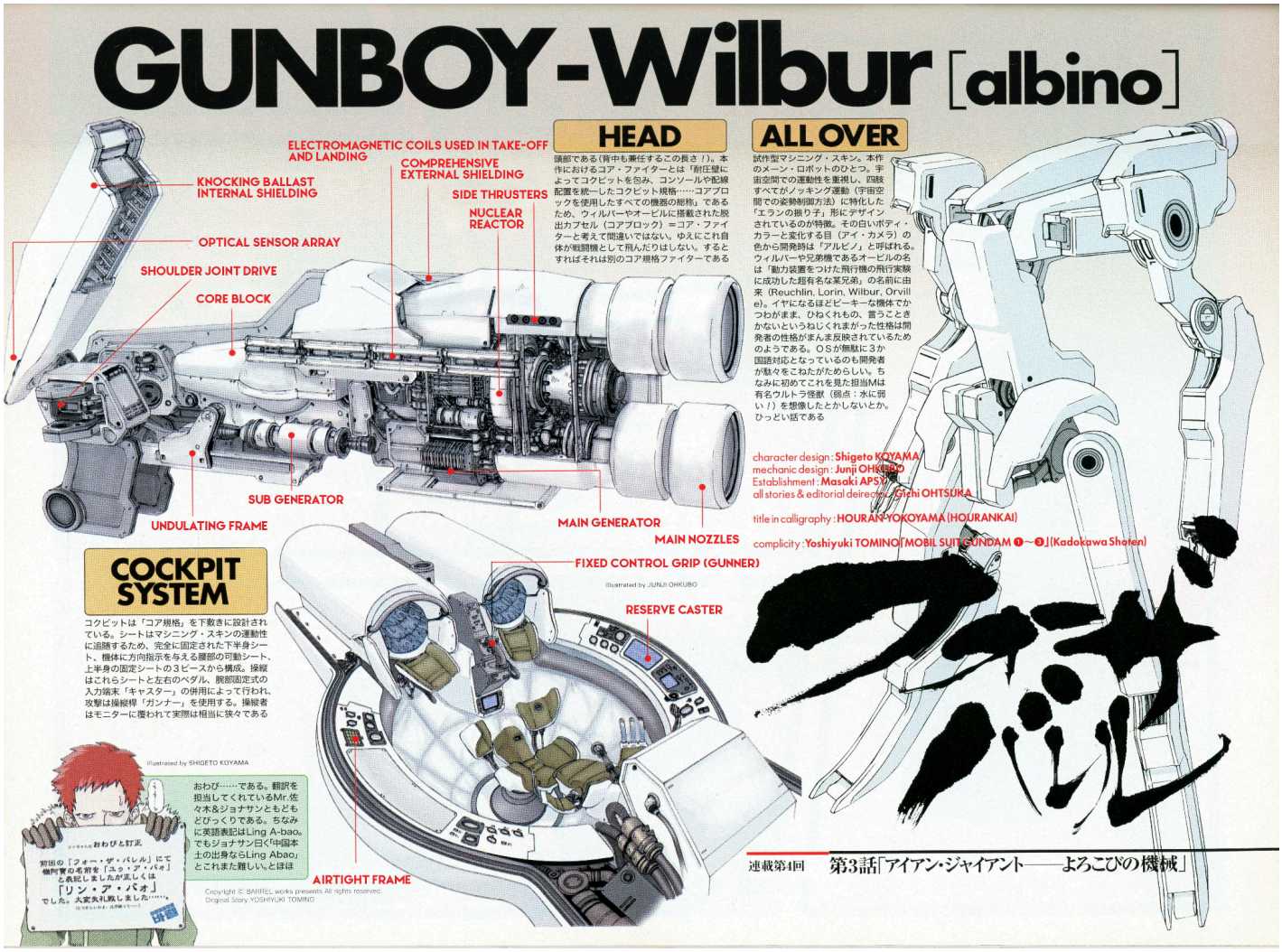
His body stopped moving on its own.

Something reconnected.

And then his mind was back.

Chapter Dossier:

GUNBOY-Wilbur “albino”



HEAD

The lengthy head portion includes the backside too. In this story, core fighter refers to “the pressure resistant walls around the cockpit and consolidation of the console and wiring into the cockpit…becoming a generic term for any

machine using a core block," so it's not wrong to use core fighter as shorthand for the escape capsule (the core block) inside the Wilbur and Orville. However, it can't fly around and act as a separate fighter unit. That would be a different kind of core fighter standardization.

ALL OVER

A prototype Machining Skin. One of the main mechas of this story. In order to prioritize mobility in outer space, all four limbs are designed to utilize "Elan's Pendulum," a unique shape designed to take advantage of knocking movement (a system of balance control in space). Because of its white body and the changing color of its (camera) eyes, it was given the name "Albino" during development. The names Wilbur and its sibling unit Orville come from the famous brothers who first succeeded in building a powered aircraft (Reuchlin, Lorin, Wilbur and Orville). It's an unbearably mercurial machine, plus it perfectly reflects its developer's personality when it comes to being selfish, contrarian and unresponsive. That same developer's tantrums seem to be the reason the operating system was forced to support three different language options. By the way, the first time a certain producer who we'll call "Mr. M" saw it, it's rumored he said he was reminded of that famous Ultra Kaiju (the one weak to water). What an awful thing to say.

COCKPIT SYSTEM

The cockpit is laid out underneath the core block. In order for the pilot to keep up with the Machining Skin's mobility, the seat is made up of three pieces: a fixed section for the lower body, a movable section for the hips and buttocks that provides directional control for the machine, and another fixed section for the upper body. Pedals on the left and right sides of the seat are used for flight control, and a terminal within arm's reach called the "Caster" is used in conjunction with the control stick called the "Gunner" to attack. The pilot is surrounded by a monitor, making the interior actually quite cramped.

-Sayla Mass:

A mysterious woman of many names. “She knows that the boy only clings to her as an outlet for his own loneliness and sexual desire. Even so, she allows it, for her own sake. Although she comes to understand the youth’s heart, she keeps that knowledge for herself. Cognizant of her power to charm men, she only approaches the boy out of a twisted sense of self-preservation. A strong woman, who is capable of nestling up to others to get what she needs. She herself has “nowhere she originally belongs,” while her adoptive father’s existence “makes going back unacceptable.” And so she tells the young heretic, “Destroy the place where I should be.” As the young man does nothing but go along with her formidable wiles, he is keenly aware of his own unpleasantness. At the same time, she’s unsatisfied with men like that. Those are the kinds of contradictions inside her.” (Taken from the planning materials) Radiating a light filled with confidence, she can be reviled by other women as a result. In particular, Frau Bohr ended up disembarking the *Pegasus* because of Sayla’s presence.

Chapter 3: “Streamers–The Ones Adrift”

The 4th Installment of the Shocking Sensation! Losing Consciousness, A-Bao is Caught up in the Nuclear Blast!

He could hear the voice clearly. “It’s because everything is your fault.” A-Bao knew this scratchy laugh. It stirred the pieces of something in the depths of his memories, the hairs on the back of his neck standing on end. Something was trying to force its way out from the pit of his stomach.

Thump The throbbing rang through his brain. A-Bao’s body had stopped moving on its own. Something made contact, and both his consciousness and sense of self returned. The flat screen in front of him displayed a view of the outside world. His mind and body still hadn’t fully linked back together. Confused at the mismatch between his cool consciousness and his flushed body, A-Bao shook his head back and forth in a daze.

It was a desolate world—refreshing itself in front of him like raw footage, faster than he could keep up. One of its creator’s self-indulgences. Thanks to that screen, he reactively flinched sixteen millimeters before hitting the ground. His eyes were open now. Plus, he was thankful. Thankful for the developer, that mule-headed father of his.

It happened again. He didn’t need any time to know what had occurred. He began to seethe with anger, and nausea. ”*I couldn’t control my own body thanks to that black box inside of me*.” Panic. Extreme situations. Times when it mattered the most. The frequency of these incidents, where my mental state is pushed to the limit and I lose control, has only been increasing. My vision narrows and my mind disconnects. And then when I awake, there’s always something awful in front of me. These blackouts are the price of my abilities. Shit! A-Bao swore into the darkness inside him.

He hit the memory playback key at his fingertips and a choppy video began to play on the smaller monitor to the side. A Blondie was attacking him. He was attacking another, separate, Blondie. It was a chaotic scene, one that he hadn't predicted. Where and what did he do wrong? He racked his memory, but gave up trying to figure out what happened before everything went blank. The anger inside him only built. All of my plans always end up going sideways. That was the only thing he knew for sure. Blondie's explosion rushed towards A-Bao, towards Wilbur. A mass of molten metal, and white hot fire raining in every direction. The buffeting blast wave. All caused by a 120mm projectile striking its nuclear reactor.

He had felt the sound of the nuclear explosion, equal to the detonation of several dozen tons of TNT, reverberating through him as it easily gouged out the hillside. Though it was only considered a micro explosion when compared to a regular nuclear bomb, its power was still devastating. And dirty. It hadn't been at all difficult for it to punch a giant hole through the multiple layers of the colony's outer wall. The aggregate of rectangular plates had been peeled away, and the cityscape was being sucked through the opening. In a flash, the signs of people's daily lives disappeared into the weightless void.

Since its surface area was relatively small, the colony used centrifugal force to generate gravity on its inner walls, and even a car could have enough of an effect to trigger accidents, depending on how fast it was traveling. The severity of the current situation, with an explosion as the catalyst, could not be overstated.

Wilbur was sent flying by the blast. A-Bao had instinctively slammed his feet against the foot pedals in an attempt to reverse thrust and kill his speed, but he still ended up crashing into the residential district about four kilometers off. He

could do nothing but writhe in agony from the impact. Over and over he tried to catch his breath, but it felt like his lungs had been crushed. His ears were filled with the sound of his own groans. It took a few minutes before he was able to breathe normally again, steadying himself as he coughed. There was a jarring pain radiating from the top of his head. Right now he was filled with regret and resentment towards that mercenary, that white guy with the nickname about his hitting power. All the money A-Bao had paid was a waste. “Slugger” Law, the ally who was supposed to have met here and come to help A-Bao. It was his fault everything had gone wrong in A-Bao’s mind.

There had been the sound of cracking bone inside his mouth, followed by the increasing taste of metal. He spat out something white, covered in blood. A molar. Balling up a fist, he punched the side of the cockpit. Somewhere, someone was laughing. Their voice was clear, and he had the feeling it belonged to a girl. It triggered something incomplete, wriggling in the depths of his memories. I know this purring, scratchy laugh. Something was trying to force itself out from inside of him. “It’s because everything is your fault.” The voice said it clearly. “I’ll be in charge of creating your past, and you’ll be in charge of creating my future. Because everything is your fault.” The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. “You can’t escape me, even if you’re reduced to nothing but your head.” Hatred welled up inside him.

□

“Someone hurry and bring me more Type A and Type AB! There should still be some left!”

Unforeseen as it had been, the sudden attack had destroyed the city with alarming ease, plunging its inhabitants into chaos. The colony’s critical utilities quickly went offline, and survivors rushed toward the port where the Pegasus was docked.

Frau Bohr was among them.

Seeing the condition of the Pegasus, she was taken aback. She had assumed that once she reached the ship, she would be able to reclaim the tranquility that had been stolen from her.

She had been mistaken.

It might have been a military ship, but there didn't seem to be a soldier anywhere. Even the medical staff's requests were drowned out by anguished screams. The surgery room was a room in name only; the ship had been delivered before its interior walls had even been installed. The wounded had been laid out in the exposed corridors, surrounded by bare metal beams.

Frau felt like gagging.

But after a few minutes tending to an injured soldier whose intestines had spilled from his body, she stopped feeling anything at all.

Her senses had gone numb.

Frau was assigned to help with the wounded soon after the evacuation and taken to the ship's gravity block. Her preferences had not entered into the decision.

Frau was irritated at being forced to sit in this pit of despair, surrounded by people crying out over lost limbs. She got over it quickly enough.

That was simply how she had always lived.

Following the medic's strained instructions, she ran toward the blood bank.

Even though her own wishes had been ignored, she didn't complain. She simply pushed them down and moved forward with single-minded purpose.

It's a little frustrating always having to bury my sense of self, but I'm the one choosing to do this.

She had convinced herself of that.

It was a lie.

The truth was that she fervently wished to be stripped of her ego—made to submit. Frau had learned that being controlled by another person's words made her euphoric. It even aroused her. It always happened that way.

Once the task was finished, she would be swallowed by emptiness. The moment she was free, she would berate herself, overcome with disgust at her own reactions. She would even seriously consider harming herself in response.

Before she knew it, these false emotions—carefully constructed as a defensive barrier—had covered over her real nature.

And yet, from behind, the sight of her leaping over the rows of injured soldiers as she ran to retrieve blood was unmistakably that of a sensual being.

More than half the shelves in the blood bank were already empty. She retrieved the requested blood types, carrying the containers in both hands, and hurried back toward the operating room.

To Fraw, the medic's words were absolute. They seized control of her body like a dull ache.

A violent crash shook the *Pegasus*.

The interior lights went out, replaced by emergency illumination. Alarms blared.

The shock wave from the Blondie's nuclear explosion had reached all the way to the port, battering the ship.

Frau dropped the blood containers and instinctively grabbed the tow grip in the hallway with all her strength.

The wounded in front of her were thrown into the air, striking the ceiling before crashing back to the floor. Their wounds tore open again, spraying blood through the air.

Her blouse—her entire body—was splattered with blood.

She endured it.

Then she heard children crying.

A trio of them, none more than ten years old, were huddled together in a corner of the hallway, trembling and wailing. The youngest, a girl, was crying the hardest.

Frau recognized her.

She was sobbing desperately for the warmth of her mother's body, Kitamoto Kikka.

□

“How many people do you think got killed?”

Kuzco Al watched the flash of the explosion, enchanted.

Pure, indiscriminate destructive power. Some people were repulsed by such power. Others were captivated by it.

Intellectually, Kuzco knew an unnecessary attack remained unnecessary. Emotionally, she considered the lives lost in battle a waste.

Yet her ashen eyes glimmered as she watched the light, fascination written plainly across her face.

Cramble Karela noticed.

“Someone inside killed our three intruders, it seems. With a nuclear explosion, no less.”

There was no way their own people would have done something as foolish as destroying one of the Earth Federation’s top-secret new Machining Skins. And certainly not by detonating a nuclear weapon.

There was an underlying trust in her compatriots behind Kuzco's words.

“They didn't even find out anything.”

That was precisely why the *Musai*-class mobile cruiser *Zanzibar* had been sent to the Barrel 7. It was the Flanagan Institute's only ship, and those aboard it—the enhanced “Streamers”—were an even greater secret.

What had brought them into what was, effectively, the Federation's own backyard?

Cramble suspected the answer had something to do with the explosion.

“I'm heading out.”

Kuzco wondered if she'd heard correctly.

“What's the matter? Upset that your compatibility with the prototype was poor? Even if you panic and come running home again, I'm not going to help you, you know. Or are you really thinking of sending out the Cramble Unit, or whatever you call it?”

Cramble clenched her fists, blood boiling, but said nothing.

Kuzco had hit the nail on the head.

She hadn't even needed to use Dive, her ability.

“You're kidding me. Wouldn't those geezers be better off doing calisthenics?”

Cramble commanded 237 aged soldiers, an elite force with a median age of sixty, fighting beneath a crossbone coat of arms. Kuzco had heard they were a force to be reckoned with, but she still had her doubts—even about whether the unit actually existed. She had never once seen so much as a glimpse of the old men.

“Keep yapping and I'll give you something else to do with those thick lips of yours. Don't let appearances deceive you. They've got plenty of vigor left. Isn't that nice? When they come in your mouth, there won't be any flavor, right? Didn't you say you can't taste? Kuzco Al?”

Tit for tat.

Kuzco was ready with an answer.

“There wouldn't be any flavor, so I'll pass, thanks. I'd hate not being able to enjoy the individual differences.”

An elderly man stepped between them.

“Would the both of you please knock it off?”

Lom Flanagan wore a white lab coat. The clacking of his shoes echoed through the quiet room.

“There's no need for either of you to go. I'm sending out the L-MESS in forty minutes.”

Their enthusiasm vanished instantly.

A chill ran through both of them.

Flanagan's words alone were enough to fill them with terror.

Every facet of the Flanagan Institute had been involved in developing the L-MESS, a prototype weapon designed for Streamer use. It employed a powerful, highly mobile ship-class engine beneath extravagant, streamlined fairings. Its elegant design was almost unthinkable for a weapon.

But Kuzco and Cramble knew its killing power firsthand.

It used the Psy-commu, an electrical amplification system capable of encoding not only human brainwaves but the waves emitted by all living creatures, including emotional ones, to power its weapons: high-speed, independently operating “Bits.”

The Bits could attack from multiple angles simultaneously, making them more devastating than a single Machining Skin. The prospect of all ten Bits in the L-MESS being deployed at once was unfathomable.

“There's no way the situation calls for that!” Cramble shrieked.

Kuzco stood frozen, staring at a point on the floor.

The glint that had filled her eyes earlier was gone. Her face had gone pale.

Flanagan didn't even need to name the pilot.

The L-MESS was a completely single-pilot machine.

That oozing, piercing, bloodthirsty light buried deep within that person's consciousness...

Kuzco couldn't stop shivering.

Flanagan continued.

“Cramble will be in charge of recovering the Gump.”

Cramble blanched.

“Gump.”

The name they'd given the Federation's prototype Machining Skin.

Flanagan had spoken the name of the forbidden machine.

“It belonged to the AEUG from the start, anyway.”

The two couldn't even muster disgust at Flanagan's grotesque smile.

The two Streamers—living killing machines themselves—were too intimidated to move.

They could hear her giggle echoing inside their heads.

They were scared senseless of their other teammate.

Lalah Sung.

Chapter Dossier:

Shima Hachijo: Japanese. Born in the floating city on Tokyo Bay. An active and slender tomboy with a bright personality. She left home and set out for space by herself while still in her teens. To pay back her passage on the *Pegasus* while it was docked at *Noah*, she joined the mechanic crew. The Hachijo family has run a repair shop specializing in machines for generations, and she has an inherent understanding that machines are simply “tools” used by people. She goes through a great amount of development during the long voyage: as a mechanic, as a human and as a woman.

Chapter 4 “Intuition Plus–The Inorganic King”

The Story So Far: The warship *Pegasus* travels to a space colony in order to receive the new space-combat model of Machining Skin, *Gunboy*. Ling A-Bao, a young G-M pilot candidate on board possessing an innate ability of precognition called “Forecast” has a vision of the coming future…and his own death. His most recent premonition showed three Machining Skins, Blondies, of enemy affiliation attempting to steal the four Gunboys stored at *Noah*, and so A-Bao abandons the *Pegasus*, going out ahead in order to reach the Gunboys first and prevent the theft. Despite his confident planning, the actual events begin to go massively awry when he is betrayed by the mysterious mercenary known as “Slugger” Law who was to assist his sortie. As he fights the Blondies while dealing with his anger towards Slugger, A-Bao is also confronted by a resurfaced memory—a mysterious girl with emerald green eyes and sun-kissed skin. All A-Bao knows is that he hates her with every fiber of his being.

Aware that his death is coming, A-Bao wants to pass on the proof that he lived to the next generation, assailing many people with his hopes and desires. The question is, will his thoughts be able to reach them?

The Plot is Rapidly Unfolding! The Novel Inspired Story on Everyone’s Mind!!

The three children were crying in the corner of the hall. There was a familiar face among them—the daughter of the Japanese family that lived in her same district. That unflinching gaze, those clingy eyes…Kitamoto Kikka began to wail as soon as she saw Fraw. It wasn’t because she was injured—that was a relief at least. Being able to cry so loudly was proof that she was unhurt.

“You kids can’t be here…” She knew that wasn’t the thing to be saying right now. But she couldn’t come up with anything else. No matter what she did, Frau just was just a bit awkward to others. She prayed Kikka wouldn’t pick up on her actual moody feelings. “What about Aunty and the others?”

Kikka only shook her head. As to what that actually indicated, Frau had no idea. It was hard to get a read on her expression from all the crying. Picking up on the fragrance of milk, Frau spontaneously reached out and put her hand against Kikka’s soft cheek. There was an elasticity to her skin…and warmth. She could feel that warmth spreading through her cold fingertips. It was a pleasant feeling that threatened to melt her frozen heart.

But the repeated crying brought her back to her senses. She hated children. Frau wasn’t about to start liking them. She really didn’t want to take them with her.

“Wait here for now, I’ll call someone to come get you.” Frau tried to get up, but Kikka wouldn’t let go of her. Frau began to get annoyed. There didn’t seem to be any other choice than to carry her somewhere else. As she turned to leave, something tugged at her. The two boys were pulling at her blouse.

“…媽媽.” (...Mama)

Cantonese? She had no idea what they were saying.

“我, 我… 我叫虎勝烈.” (I, I … My name is Fu Shing-Letz)

“我叫虎勝剋.” (I am Fu Shing-Katz)

Sensing Fraw’s confusion, the boys had given their names. The sounds were unfamiliar to the point that she couldn’t even parse them. All she could figure was that they were brothers. Their clingy eyes told her that they wanted to come along too. She began to, internally, seethe…this was turning into a hassle. However, she couldn’t just carry Kikka alone.

She passed the blood packs to the boys. She couldn't return to the operating room without these. After all, that was the duty that Frau had been given. Her body felt lighter again as she remembered the medic's request. Other people's words, binding me, ignoring me. She could feel her body reacting. She had a strong urge to be commanded. Just the thought of it sent heat spreading through her insides. It was a desire that she wouldn't admit to…a desire that gave her no choice but to deeply curse being a woman, whenever it arose.

People didn't die easily. They struggle, they writhe, they scream and condemn the world, and then once they've finally burned through all of their energy they die. She didn't think they were pleading desperately to live. When she listened to the screams of the mortally wounded, what she heard was, "Kill me!!" No one seemed prepared for death. Whether or not they actually wanted to live or to die, she didn't know. Trapped in the destruction of war, people lose their sense of self…the fragility of that awareness was the only thing that had become clear to her. Only the people possessing a strong desire would fight to survive.

Beneath Fraw's quiet exterior, she hid that sort of desire. The strength of her desire was keeping her going, and right now these three kids were getting in the way of that. Fraw's thoughts were filled with how she could dump them onto someone else.

–

In the beginning, those that were said to be geniuses in their fields of art, sciences or culture received no other confirmation aside from being viewed as people possessing extraordinary talents. However the sudden appearance of a single boy, whose abilities couldn't be said to be anything other than extra-sensory, necessitated a rethinking of those traditional means of confirmation, to determine whether there really was "another" humanity.

Tragically, none of the people trying to confirm him as an Esper or Streamer saw him as anything other than mentally ill, and the boy's family was ripped

apart by the strain of all scrutiny that was invited. Even the boy's existence was eventually buried as a historical footnote by his family.

The boy was taken in by a single man with connections to the military, and on the night of his 14th birthday he was brought to space. Beyond the atmosphere, he found his adopted father waiting for him in the lobby, together with a white-haired man. The elderly man introduced himself as Flanagan, and welcomed the boy warmly.

"Right now, Earth lacks the tools necessary to understand you, but space will gladly accept you. Won't you help show a hopeless old man the dawn of a new era?"

Here was someone who wasn't afraid of his powers. More than anything else, that made the boy happy. Out here in space, perhaps it wasn't just people's bodies that were lighter, but their hearts as well, he thought to himself naively.

It was the same with Kuzco Al. After all, that was the reason she was here. It was a place that took precedence over ideology or countrymen. However, "belonging nowhere else but here" also meant "having nowhere else to run."

Hypothetically, even if she found a means of escaping, she would be confronted by that purring laugh inside her head. It made her skin crawl. The vellus hair along her back stood on end, and the chills wouldn't stop. Her compatriot was truly terrifying. The "older sister" that demanded absolute obedience, even though she was actually younger in age. The First Number of the Original Four, brutality incarnate. It was impossible to escape from her. Absolutely impossible. And so, Kuzco felt she had no other choice but to spend her life aboard this ship.

"The L-MESS isn't complete, he said so himself at that, why is he sending it out?" Cramble screeched.

“The L-MESS isn’t complete. He said so himself. So why is he sending it out?” Cramble screeched.

They were inside *Celebration*, the ship’s lounge. There had once been a city in Florida with the same name. Kuzco had no idea why anyone had chosen it. Cramble had only figured it out after learning that the city had been completely sterile.

A 3D monitor on the wall displayed a streamlined purple machine with elegant fairings: the L-MESS, a Streamer-use prototype weapon equipped with two mega particle cannons.

Its shape really did make it look like a trident.

Kuzco hated that.

Harpoons reminded her of the sea in her hometown. Just as it had been for the boy, Earth had been nothing more than a painfully cramped place to Kuzco. So that was why her compatibility with the L-MESS 2 was poor...

Well, she wasn't entirely wrong.

Kuzco still couldn't fully control the ten “Bits,” small remote weapons attached to the L-MESS 2. Its Psy-commu technology took a pilot's psycho-waves and electrically amplified them, making the weapon highly responsive to their mental state.

When confronted with images from her primal landscape, Kuzco's terror index spiked. The sea produced an especially strong negative reaction.

The researchers had tried to determine whether there was a connection between her primal landscape and the time she had spent in the womb, but they had never found an explanation they considered satisfactory.

She simply hated the ocean.

Despite that, floating through space wasn't a problem for her. Even Kuzco herself couldn't explain the distinction.

Suddenly, the gravelly laughter inside their heads stopped.

The abrupt silence made them uneasy.

It was a bad omen.

Cramble noticed something and stared out into empty space. He could sense the color of fear. He wasn't sure whether he should say anything.

Kuzco instinctively used Dive—her ability to understand others—to reach him.

The L-MESS launched from *Zanzibar* a few minutes later. The rhythm of that voice's breathing had changed. It was muffled now, almost a groan.

A laser struck the surface of the Oval Core moments before the fusion material packed inside the cartridge reached criticality.

Implosion.

The two of them stared at the display. Screams. Rage. Fear.

The emotions of battle washed over them like filthy water.

The two cannon ports opened.

The L-MESS's mega particle cannons fired. Flashes of light streaked through the darkness. Far away, something burst.

An explosion.

And the voice was laughing again. “What the hell is she!?” Kuzco's voice echoed through the room. Her skin felt colder than usual. Cramble was no longer there. In his place stood the freshly awakened Challia Bull.

–

A-Bao sat in Wilbur's cockpit. It was a tight, dark space. He could hear that purring laugh coming from far off. “*An auditory hallucination?”* He shook his

head. The voice was still there. It had a grating quality, echoing deep inside his cerebrum.

It was icy and clear, whatever it was, and the chill he felt from it only kept spreading. His head hurt. His face twisted from the pain. Someone was forcing the key into the lock on A-Bao's memories. His consciousness went soaring.

There was a single girl there. She was sitting on a chair. It was a wide open space, surrounded by white plastic walls. An enormous room. A sterile room. Pale white light shined in from the other side of the walls. The girl was laughing. Her emerald green eyes twinkled brightly. There was a slight moisture in them. However, there was certainly no gentleness in their glint. Malice and bloodlust…the word "desire" came to A-Bao. He couldn't get rid of the uneasy feeling crawling across his skin. WHO are you? A-Bao tried to remember. It was useless. As soon as he tried to focus, the image of the girl quickly faded. But her laugh…and his sense of revulsion, didn't.

He was attacked by searing pain. A-Bao doubled over. That hatred was still building through his body. Something was there at the other end of this pain, he was sure of it. Pushing down the two foot pedals, the ultra compact reactor roared to life. Flames erupted from the large nozzle on Wilbur's back. The house behind him melted away in the heat. When the blast wave hit he had been sent flying through a total of six civilian housing units.

A-Bao looked for the Blondies' locations. One had exploded. The second, the one with the severed arm…he had the feeling that he had seen it get sucked through the giant hole opened by the explosion. That left the third. He didn't see any sign of it. A-Bao slid out Wilbur's keyboard. He wanted to try running the current situation through a simulation.

It only took a couple minutes to enter the data and run the calculations. An agonizingly long amount of time in combat. He nibbled at the tips of his fingernails as he waited. Fraw's infamous look of disapproval popped into his

head. He had quite a collection of chewed off nails in his mouth by this point—he spat them out onto the floor of the cockpit. His spit left a red streak, blood from his broken tooth. The monitor blinked. The simulation was finished.

According to Wilbur's calculations, the third Blondie had ended up in the opposite direction. It would have been blown past the center of the cylindrical colony, over towards the false sea by Sector 4. The incredibly shallow "sea" had a bottom of blue glass, fifty centimeters thick. It must have crashed in the area where there were shards of glass everywhere. Without hesitation, A-Bao launched Wilbur towards the crash site.

All of his predictions had come out much too differently. He hadn't anticipated any of this. He needed to know what was going on. There was no other choice…he decided to contact the *Pegasus* using his video comm. No answer. He tried again. Same result. Then, a blinking alert. He had an incoming call on the monitor. It was from the *Pegasus*. He answered it, and a spectacled man appeared on the other end. Marker raised his voice in surprise.

"A-Bao! So it was you! Not only did you go AWOL, but you went and took Wilbur yourself? What are you doing man, your ass is gonna get nailed for this!"

The two of them got along well, frequently chatting. A-Bao couldn't help but suddenly feel very nostalgic at the sight of Marker. "Never mind that, is the *Pegasus* okay?"

"We took a direct hit. They got the bridge. Ensign Bright is commanding from the sub-bridge right now. At any rate, he still wants to recover the Wilbur and surviving Orville units. If you see anything that looks usable, he says to bring it all over."

"Koo and the rest are still there aren't they? What's Hayato doing?" A-Bao's question didn't end up reaching Marker. The screen shook and the line dropped

out. He tried reconnecting. Nothing. One more time. Still no connection. He clicked his tongue. He was only getting more irritated. Nothing was going right. He gave up on the communicator. Every single thing had gone wrong. What had he gotten wrong as he worked backwards from his Forecast? A-Bao didn't know. It was too late to go back now.

At the very least he had to track down that white son of bitch, he thought. Slugger Law. That man had "ruined everything". He wasn't about to let this go. A-Bao took a deep breath and closed his eyes. The fatigue had hit him all at once. The world was waiting for him to lead the way. However, A-Bao had only been given the opportunity and nothing more.

There wasn't a lot of time left until his death, he could feel it. The things that he'd be unable to accomplish. That was what he really couldn't get over. He couldn't figure it out. Right now, A-Bao couldn't figure out anything.

Chapter Dossier:

-GUNBOY-Orville (Subayashi Hayato's Machine)

One of the two varieties of prototype machines stationed aboard the *Pegasus*, piloted by Subayashi Hayato. Its ID code is C108 (Koo's machine is C109). The differences in body color are a result of changes in the armor; the materials used in the C108's plating are denser compared to the C109. Due to the overall heavier weight, the knocking movement and other balance related values are still being tuned. Hayato's machine has a single stripe on its chest, while Koo's has two.

-Lalah Sung:

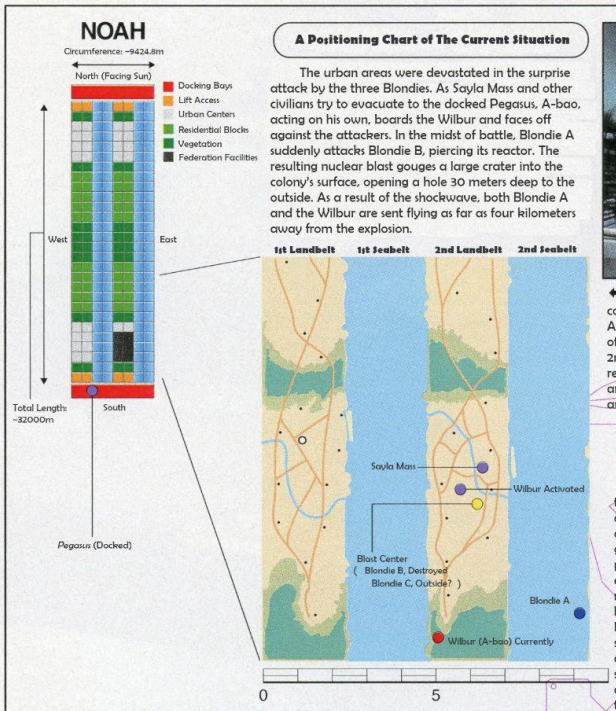
Emerald eyes, clear, firm brown skin, slender limbs, exquisite features and a face that men would die for. She has a habit of laughing with her throat, which comes out sounding like a deep purring.

Lalah Sung, one of the Original Four: the quartet of Espers created by the Flanagan Institute. Her abilities appeared early in her childhood and have only blossomed since coming to space. Details of her birth are shrouded in mystery, but she made her living working as a prostitute.

A wealthy young man ended up taking her in, which led to receiving psychic training from the Institute. The youngest member of the Original Four, her ferocity and brutality is on a completely different level from the others. Many of the people around Lalah live in constant terror of her.

She has shown to have specializations in the abilities Empath (Understanding), Forecast (Prediction) and Authenticity (Truth). More than anything else she hates getting water on her skin, and she loves the feeling of being dry.

The diamond-shaped lens implanted into her forehead is of the highest quality, valuable enough to be able to buy a Machining Skin.



A Positioning Chart of The Current Situation

The urban areas were devastated in the surprise attack by the three Blondies. As Sayla Mass and other civilians try to evacuate to the docked Pegasus, A-bao, acting on his own, boards the Wilbur and faces off against the attackers. In the midst of battle, Blondie A suddenly attacks Blondie B, piercing its reactor. The resulting nuclear blast gouges a large crater into the colony's surface, opening a hole 30 meters deep to the outside. As a result of the shockwave, both Blondie A and the Wilbur are sent flying as far as four kilometers away from the explosion.

⬅⬆ Various depictions of *Noah*'s newly completed South Block, under Federation Army control. The area on the 1st Landbelt is off limits for resettlement, and the area on the 2nd Landbelt is used for machining skin research and development. Residential areas are limited to people connected to the military, and civilian access is prohibited.

In this era, humanity has succeeded in transplanting the Earth into space. The colony turns at a rate of one revolution per minute, creating artificial gravity through the centrifugal force generated against the inner walls. Moreover, this provides atmospheric circulation as a synergistic effect. Outside of controlled functions such as rotation and daylight, everything else is happens by biochemical reaction. As shown in the diagram, the Northern side (oriented towards the Sun) is used as a space port, but it also serves as a solar power plant and provides lighting. The sunlight captured here is sent through a light transmitting network along the cylinder's axis, providing the Sun's illumination through the surface of the ground.

Enormous Cylindrical Stuctures Floating in Space: An Explanation of Colonies

The enormous drain on natural resources required for industrialization and a burgeoning population, along with the buildup of hazardous waste matter that accompanied those changes drove the Earth's ecosystem into crisis. As a result, humanity began its expansion into space in order to secure a new habitat. The key element of this plan established artificial land masses in space—"Space Colonies". These were designed with the prerequisite of guaranteeing a habitat that was no different from Earth, being mostly automated while providing absolute stability out in space. However, when resettlement began there were quite a few people voicing their suspicions regarding the risks of leaving Earth, especially as far as "absolute stability" was concerned.

With a diameter of 3 km and a total length of 32 km the enormous cylinder shaped colonies provide a sealed environment, with a single one able to support slightly over 100,000 residents. Emigration from Earth continues to move into clusters of colonies placed at various Lagrange points. These clusters are organized into economic blocs of 40 colonies called "Sides", which are then broken into groups of nationalized "States", made up of one to nine colonies. A single colony in every State is established as a "Bunch", which handles administrative duties (in cases of a single colony State the term still applies). Ever since the establishment of Side 3, independent nations have been gaining more and more influence within the Federation Assembly based on their number of colonies, and as a result countries wishing to strengthen their influence began to turn to the ignominious method of compulsory space immigration. Even putting this aside, the problems related to immigration appear to be endless.

連載第6回　第5話「サイエンス・フィクション——失くした1/2」

NEWVISION,NEWVALUE,NEWSTORY
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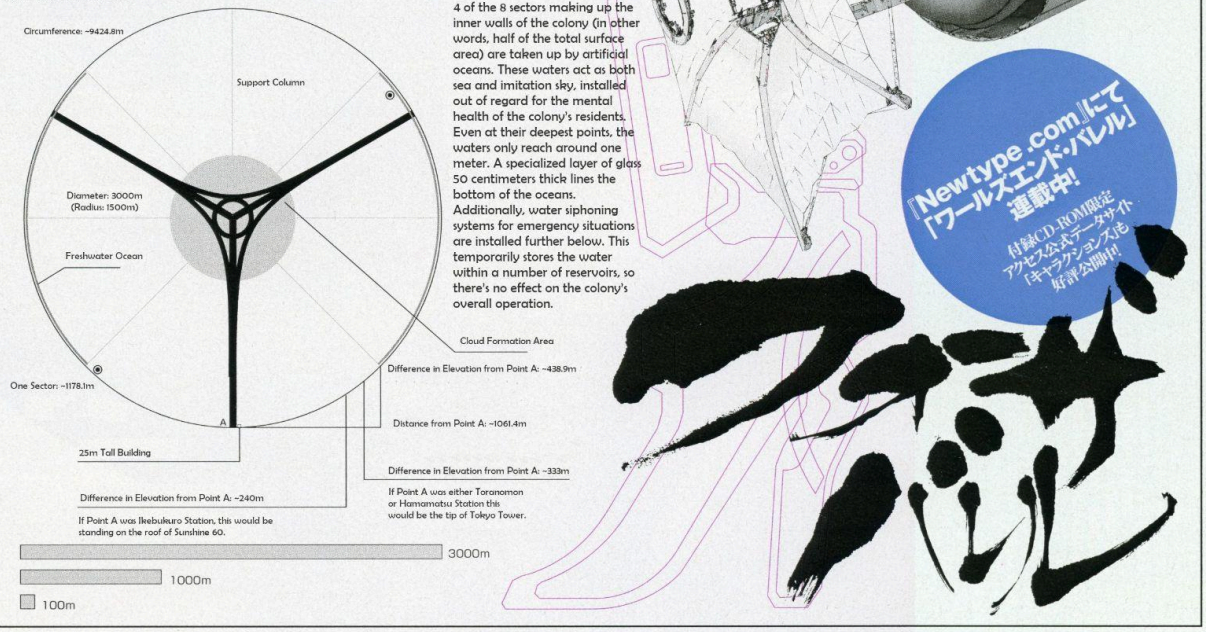
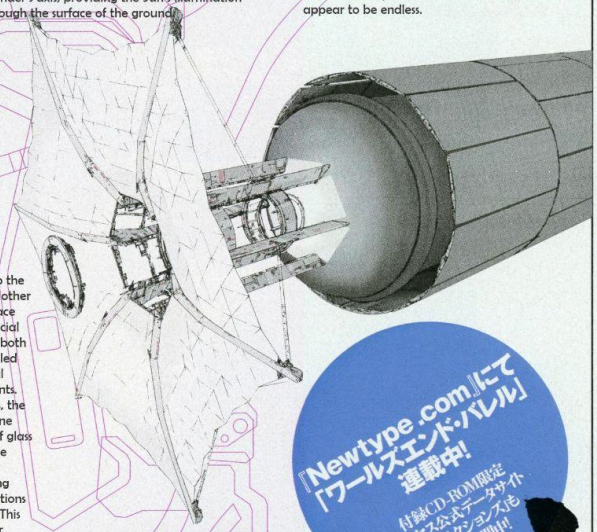

Circumference: ~9424.8m
Support Column
Diameter: 3000m
(Radius: 1500m)
Freshwater Ocean
One Sector: ~1178.1m
A
Cloud Formation Area
Difference in Elevation from Point A: ~438.9m
Distance from Point A: ~1061.4m
25m Tall Building
Difference in Elevation from Point A: ~333m
If Point A was either Toranomon or Hamamatsu Station this would be the tip of Tokyo Tower.
Difference in Elevation from Point A: ~240m
If Point A was Ikebukuro Station, this would be standing on the roof of Sunshine 60.
3000m
1000m
100m

4 of the 8 sectors making up the inner walls of the colony (in other words, half of the total surface area) are taken up by artificial oceans. These waters act as both sea and imitation sky, installed out of regard for the mental health of the colony's residents. Even at their deepest points, the waters only reach around one meter. A specialized layer of glass 50 centimeters thick lines the bottom of the oceans. Additionally, water siphoning systems for emergency situations are installed further below. This temporarily stores the water within a number of reservoirs, so there's no effect on the colony's overall operation.



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Chapter 5 “Science Fiction–The Missing 1/2”

The story so far: Foreseeing his own death and hoping for a way to leave proof of his existence to the new generation, pilot candidate Ling A-Bao went AWOL from the space battleship *Pegasus*, going on ahead to the space colony where the ship was set to accept the new model of space combat weapon—the Machining Skin “Gunboy Wilbur.” This was thanks to his innate ability of premonition, also known as Forecast, which showed him a picture of the expected future. In his vision the Gunboy was captured by three Machining Skins—Blondies, of unknown affiliation, and so A-Bao set off alone to board the Wilbur first and prevent the theft. A-Bao charges forward recklessly, determined to accomplish his goals. However, due to the betrayal of the mysterious mercenary “Slugger” Law, A-Bao’s careful planning and the hopes of a smooth operation begin to go hugely awry. A-Bao must deal with his anger at Slugger while simultaneously dealing with the return of old memories and the shadowy presence of the girl called Lalah Sung. Will A-Bao be able to convey his ideas to the next generation?

Space…it was like he wasn’t interested at all. He never had the desire to go, not even once. People of the 20th century may have looked to space with reverence and admiration, but Law didn’t have any of that.

“I get to look at the stars while I take a piss.” That’s how the old astronauts had explained their job—with plenty of cynicism. Despite that, outer space continued to spark people’s dreams. He didn’t get it.

“I wouldn’t go up there even for my own mother’s burial.” A pet saying of Law’s. It seemed like the colonies even enforced where you could and couldn’t drink alcohol. There’s no way he could attend a funeral in a place like that. The

quasi-alcoholic capsule beers that were so trendy nowadays could never satisfy his taste for the real thing.

Space…a world where for every action, death was always close at hand. Thinking about it, Law only felt cramped and restricted. There were no dreams or inspiration. He wanted to live on Earth. Earth was enough for him. More than anything else, I'd never be able to show off my magnificent swing if there was no gravity. If he couldn't hear that sound, like an axe slicing through the air, it was pointless. That was all there was to it.

This was not to say he didn't understand what it meant to dream. He had played in the Majors.

Times had changed, but baseball remained as popular as ever. The owner of Law's team had been young and rich, and the treatment of its players was probably the best in the league. Every game was a continuous cycle of nerves and excitement. Every cell in his body felt pushed to its limits, and he couldn't get enough of the high.

His teammates were the strongest players around, and they made a great group. Then there was the compensation. He'd be set for the rest of his life.

It was no wonder he loved the pros.

He'd had the best life had to offer.

All of it ended after three years.

He was suddenly informed that he was being let go. Laid off.

It wouldn't have been funny even as a joke.

He took the wearable audio player hanging around his neck and smashed it against the wall, reducing it to pieces. He'd been producing good results.

Just moments before, his agent had been explaining that his contract renewal was proceeding smoothly.

It had all been a lie.

Law fired him on the spot and said he wanted a new agent.

They ignored him. His blood boiling, he raised a fist.

“Wonderful.”

A monotone, digitally produced voice spoke from behind him. The black security guard.

He grabbed Law from behind and locked him in a full nelson. His arms felt like hardened plastic—the muscle modifications currently in vogue. Law could feel the guard's metal bone reinforcements, too.

He was beaten to a pulp.

His entire body was wracked with pain.

Only yesterday, he had been a powerful batter. Now he was being treated as less than human. Even after a week, he still couldn't stand.

–

Things were falling apart. He was sure of it. From that day onward there was a drastic change in his behavior. An inky darkness was spreading across his soul. Distrust…anger. How was he supposed to vent? He didn’t know.

On his worst days spent drunk. He publicly disparaged his former teammates. When he got bored of hitting women he’d tie them down, fuck them, urinate in their mouths. And then beat them again. On those days? The rage remained.

He didn’t want to go to the Minor Leagues. He knew from his teammates’ stories how drastically different they *were*. The pay, the treatment—it might as well have been the difference between heaven and earth. On top of that, they moved from one place to the other using old fashioned float transports, which

took dozens of hours. Ever since turning pro he had never once taken anything other than jet travel.

The people that might have reached out to him disappeared. He was completely shut out, all except for one person. His new, third-rate agent. Law didn't trust him, but there was no one else he could turn to. That was how far he had sunk.

They were having dinner at a Korean barbeque joint out on the edge of town. It was an unfamiliar place to him, only useful as a spot to meet. His agent, dressed in a suit, produced a standard size memory wafer and told him he was being invited to play in the Japanese leagues.

Japan. He had as much interest going there as he did going to space. The world's largest electronics empire. Law had seen the news of the aquatic metropolis built in Saitama. The completely digital Shin Za City. Just thinking about it made him dizzy. He was the type of person that wouldn't even touch a computer if given the choice.

The Country of Electric Dreams. No matter how many times he tried to imagine it, he couldn't get beyond the mental image of those four-eyed, buck-toothed shrimps looking at him, servile smiles plastered on their faces. They weren't suited to bats and gloves. In the Majors there were plenty of Japanese players, but he thought of Japanese players and Japan itself as entirely separate things.

He didn't even think it was a country that could comprehend baseball. That he would get asked to play in a place like that was hilarious. But on the other hand, the pay was definitely better than the Minors. He was torn.

At one time there had been a Japanese player on his team. Law watched him pick up a bat reverently, like he was picking up a samurai sword. It almost looked like he was conversing with it. It was truly perplexing.

“Are bats still such a rare item in Japan?” Saying that out loud, Law laughed. The Japanese man didn’t smile. He just answered quietly.

“In Japan there is the belief that objects are a vessel for the soul. And it’s true, spirits really do dwell within objects. It’s something that you people will never be able to understand.”

He remembered that exchange. For some reason, it was something that he had never been able to get out of his head ever since. Spirits live within objects…it was all he could think about. He couldn’t settle on an answer. Painfully, he quit drinking. He got back into shape. And then he got an air card to Japan. Spirits dwell within objects…he wanted to know what that meant. Why he couldn’t understand. Law just wanted to know.

It was a country where online games had progressed to their fifth generation, enthralling kids and adults alike. But even in this island nation, baseball could hold its head high as the most popular of the major sports. The excitement of the games was nothing less than expected of the national sport. However, something was fundamentally different from the Majors.

Disappointment…wasn’t the issue. But it didn’t get his blood pumping. He never heard the sound off his bat like an axe slicing through the air. It was the first time in his life that he was playing baseball without being enraptured by it. He was plagued by out of character thoughts, with everyday spent focusing solely on the idea that “spirits live within objects.”

Law had more or less given up drinking entirely since coming to Japan, but one day a teammate invited him out for a night on the town. It was a spur of the moment decision, he hadn't even been that enthusiastic about it, but the taste of alcohol after so long was simply *delicious*. A 1984 bourbon. His stomach hungered for more. Before he knew it, the bottle was empty. He ordered another. The woman beside him laughed at his tremendous thirst as she poured bourbon into a tumbler. She was Japanese—Miharu was her name. Slugger couldn't take his eyes off of her and that night, the two of them retired to his room in a moonlight tryst.

From then on he would go out every night to the same place. He held tightly to Miharu, as if she sustained him. Her dark eyes were so beautiful, they threatened to swallow up everything around her. When he was with her, Law experienced pleasure that felt like his entire body was melting. He wanted her all for himself. Before he knew it she had become his world. Being able to meet Miharu, that by itself was worth coming to Japan, he thought. Thank goodness for my third rate agent.

He asked her to show him around the old places, the sights of Japan, and she gladly agreed. Law was thrilled that she'd even take a break from the bar to accompany him. Castles and temples—compared to modern Japan—those kinds of places left a completely different impression on him.

Looking at Japan, he felt that he was looking at a tangled mess of threads, all of them fraying and coming undone. But ancient Japan was a tapestry of even threads traveling vertically and horizontally, not one out of place. That was the feeling he got. "That's exactly it!", Miharu said laughing.

No matter where or what it was, all of these places were wonderful. Law was particularly moved by the giant statue of the Buddha. He had seen it before on a memory wafer, but at that time he had been uninterested. Seeing it in person

though, he trembled. Spirits dwell within objects. He understood now. Seeing the image of the Buddha, he understood. The enormous, smiling statue faced him. He could actually see the soul behind the piercing light of those eyes. It felt like the haze that clung to his whole body had been lifted.

Life in Japan was fun.

Up until Miharu betrayed him.

For the first time since coming to Japan, his blood boiled. He hit her when he found out she'd been two-timing him.

My arms shouldn't be used for hitting women.

"Why did you betray me?" He questioned her angrily. She only laughed. He had been made into a fool. He was humiliated. As he wept, they engaged in a hateful, final, intercourse. She spat on him, her saliva mixed with blood.

He hit her again. There was no place for Law inside her dark eyes. Nothing but rejection. He didn't want to think about anything—he couldn't think about anything. He blacked out. What seemed like a few days later the Heidao appeared, a gang of Taiwanese triads in the flesh, and she was gone.

"This is Japan. What the fuck are you skittering around here for?" Law asked. They didn't give him an answer. Just a fist. With enhanced muscles and metal bones, they smashed his face, shattering his nose and realigning his features. Blood poured from his nostrils. Every blow he delivered to Miharu was paid to him ten-fold by the Triads.

"Miharu, she was our boss's woman," the Heidao group lobbed at him. Law told them to go to hell. Or he would have, but his mouth wasn't working. He was allowed to leave. There was nothing but pain through his entire body. He couldn't get up. He wanted to go home, but he couldn't. He was so far in debt

that a lifetime of work wouldn't be enough to pay it off. He owed a truly outrageous sum. Law fell further into the darkness.

He couldn't escape.

Why is this happening to me?

He didn't understand.

He was released from his baseball contract. Finally, he had nothing left. Everything had fallen apart. There was no other way to see it. The Majors, Japan, his relationship with Miharu. But he didn't know how to respond. What brought me to this place? What did I accomplish? What did I accomplish!? There was no reply from the darkness. It just gripped him tighter.

An offer arrived from the same Heidao—his entire body went numb. He shook his head. That wasn't an option. Out came the metal arms. Around the twentieth blow, Law shook his head again. This time, it was in the affirmative.

"I like a sensible man."

His arms and legs were bound, and he was put on a float. That was the end of his time in Japan. His baseball uniform was replaced with a thin anti-grav suit. As for the number on his back—there was none, obviously.

He had heard of the Nimrod races before, in passing.

It was gambling for a new era, using an abandoned orbital elevator. Strapped inside core boosters, which were little more than metal coffins, it was an all-out drag race to the sky, requiring skill, bravery, and a lot of luck. Ten units of fuel were provided, to be divided between accelerating and braking.

Before the race, lots were drawn to decide which of the six prepared core boosters each racer would be riding in. After that the booster would accelerate by linear motor, switching to rocket propulsion once the ignition line was reached. Once the breaking point was hit, all you had to do was fire the counter jets and come to a stop within the orbital terminus. And if you couldn't stop—the upper atmosphere was waiting beyond. It was a world that moved at 800 kilometers per hour. The thin protective suit wasn't any more than an emotional support. You couldn't even breath as you raced—it was impossible.

The cheers and jeers of the spectators came in many languages. The pilots were seen as people who had thrown their lives away. The compensation was extremely high. So was the overwhelming fatality rate. But somehow, Law survived. He had no interest in space. "Even if my own mother died you couldn't get me to go!" Keeping that in mind, he continued to successfully stop at the terminal point. He had been a great batter. That's what his teammates had said. At some point, people had started calling him "Slugger" and the name simply stuck.

Several months later, a man appeared before him. Slugger, I'm going to be your sponsor, he said. There was no way Slugger believed him. He didn't look like anything more than a punk kid. The man used the word "future" a lot. Everything he did was for the sake of the future. It was nauseating. There was nothing in Law's future except hell. But the man just repeated himself. It's all for the sake of the future. Ling A-Bao—that was his name.

Chapter Dossier:

-Machining Skin "Blondie"

The first Machining Skin. Using the design of the machining worker "Quicksilver" as its basis, the addition of a compact fusion reactor and thermonuclear rockets resulted in a humanoid weapon which became the starting point for much of Machining Skin development. The power output of the old machining workers is incomparable to that provided by the equipped nuclear reactor. The frame and motive unit have been reinforced to their limits, and it's a matter of course that the knocking method has been utilized to increase mobility. The limbs on the lower body even allow it to be capable of trotting under gravity. The upper body has inherited the unique characteristics of the Quicksilver, and the ability to use a variety of loadouts based on mission type is a prerequisite of its design. Of the three machines that infiltrated *Noah*, one has been destroyed, one has been blown outside the colony and the last was sent flying four kilometers away from the blast center.

However there are many mysteries surrounding this last unit; the body of the pilot assigned to it was later discovered in the entrance area to which *Noah* is chief among them.

Chapter 6 “Science Fiction–The Oblivion of Law”

The story so far: A-Bao is a pilot candidate assigned to the space battleship *Pegasus*, en route to a space colony to receive the new model of space combat weapon, the Machining Skin “Gunboy.” Thanks to an innate ability of premonition called “Forecast,” he sees a vision of the expected future, as well as his own death, and begins moving to prevent it. He searches for Slugger Law, a disgraced former Major League Baseball player turned mercenary who can never make enough money to pay his debts. Slugger recounts his past as A-Bao’s proposed ‘future’ unfolds.

A lone young man stood in front of Law…

The relationship between A-Bao and Law is about to be revealed!

The majority of events do not happen out of the blue, but instead result when things large and small accumulate together, and then get released into the world by some type of catalyst. Like how it takes time for the filthy rain water pooling on your roof to cause a leak. That’s how Law viewed things.

To him, the man that had appeared to him was surely that catalyst. In the days he had spent after leaving the Major Leagues he had accumulated more than enough. Too much. However, Law didn’t yet see him as someone that would play a vital role in his life. The man had just shown up in front of him without warning after all.

“The Nimrod race was more wild than the rumors say.” The young man stepped into Law’s room, a spacious apartment those Heidao Triads had provided. It smelled of blood and bile. Of alcohol and piss and semen. A smashed chair. Scattered clothing. The stagnant room stood in contrast to the mild sunlight shining through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows. This was Law’s room.

“Hey, ‘Sleggar.’ How does it feel to live at 800 kilometers an hour?” The man asked rudely, without even introducing himself. On top of that, he had mispronounced Law’s nickname. “What does that do to the body? Feels like breaking apart? How about your head? You black out?”

Even without looking at the sporadic discarded needles it should have been easy to picture the fractured existence of this room’s occupant. But the man continued to stand there talking. To back Law into a corner. To gain a mental advantage. Law might have not been the brightest, but even he could tell that much.

“Does it give you such a thrill that you want to *die*? So much despair that you take *drugs*?”

Law could feel himself burning up at the man’s slurried words. There was something about his heavily accented English that touched a nerve. He was wearing a green parka…someone with the Federation. Law didn’t know anyone in the army. *Who the hell are you*? He wanted to yell, but his mouth wouldn’t move. He was currently tripping, trapped between pleasure and despair.

He was laying flat and motionless in a corner of the room, a strand of drool running from his mouth to the floor. His eyes unfocused, his jaw slack. This was his sanctuary. The only place he could rest after being battered by the speed and turned into a ragdoll, an asylum where he could wallow in terror at the oncoming g-forces. A break room prepared in the depths of hell.

The large garden surrounding the house wasn’t there to be a luxury for Law. It was to prevent escape. Even now, the garden was lurking with murderous thugs who could come jumping out at any moment, and once you were beyond them there stood a wall twice as tall as Law to crush any further hope. Even if he could make it over the wall, he knew that there was nowhere to run to. In the first place, he didn’t even know where on Earth he currently was, and once

outside he'd still be in bloodthirsty Heidao territory. It was easy to imagine this landscape was a completely lawless place.

Getting beaten by those enhanced metal arms had been excruciating. Just thinking about it made his stomach turn. The fear of that pain was only magnified by the drugs. *Even if I'm being attacked by hallucinations now I won't try to run away*, he thought. That's how deeply the pain was engraved into his body.

"Are you listening? Somebody is talking to you."

The man grabbed ahold of the collapsed Law by his hair. Law wasn't listening. He didn't want to listen either. *Who the hell are you*? His mouth still wasn't working. But the man understood.

"My name? You want to know? A-Bao, Ling A-Bao, and I've come a very long way to meet you. Now listen very well. I'm going to be your sponsor. Understand? I'm going to take care of you."

He didn't like the sound of any of it. Nor did he believe him. *A kid like you can go eat shit for all I care, now get out of my house before I fucking kill you*! Law's anger didn't make it into words.

Ling A-Bao—a punk kid from Taiwan. He had a pale, unhealthy looking complexion and his English was hard to understand. Whatever he did, he was always looking at the big picture. A naïve, pushy brat—it was nauseating. Law didn't want anything to do with him. He didn't want to get involved.

It wasn't just A-Bao. Law didn't want to get involved with any other human being. That was how deeply the cavity in his soul had become. The unending cycle of despair. The terror of the Nimrod races. Those reinforced metal fists. He just wanted all of it to disappear.

However, he didn't want to die.

His entire body was in a fog. It felt like he was going insane. He couldn't go insane. It was frustrating. He couldn't do anything. He couldn't do anything but hate the people who had ruined him. Who *had* ruined him? He didn't know.

"You don't know anything, do you?" He thought he heard the voice from far away. A cold voice, laughing at him. The merciless voice that had torn him to pieces. It struck him through the heart. It was Miharu's voice.

The days he spent together with Miharu were full of kindness and passion. He had been happy. But the door was suddenly slammed shut, and all of the light vanished. I was rejected. Miharu's eyes rejected me. Pain. Sadness. But she just laughed. She was laughing at me. His blood boiled and he snapped. He couldn't hold back. I punched her in the face. Again and again. As he did, the rejection in her eyes grew stronger and stronger. He wept as he hit her.

Miharu's hand touched my crotch. His penis was hard—full of lust. His lower body was so hot that it seemed like it could burn. "You fucking scum!" She spat at him. You weren't the kind of woman that would do something like that. "Japan isn't the only thing that's tangled and fraying! You! It's all because of you that I—"

I had no idea what she meant. "What did I do!?" I wailed shrilly, the tears running down my face.

“You don’t do anything! You can’t do anything! That’s why you get taken advantage of, you sick bastard!”

The first time was when he was cut. When he received his notice of dismissal from the ball club. This was the second time. His world deflated around him. It was like an onset of vertigo—there was a crashing sound, and I lost any sense of reason. He fell into the darkness. The pain in his fists disappeared. The tears stopped. *Death. I killed her. I killed Miharu.*

Darkness—the color of Miharu’s eyes. Those dark, dark eyes. The eyes he was looking at were green though. It was A-Bao. The sun had already gone down. Time had passed—at some point Law had fallen asleep.

“...Y-You awake? I don’t know how you can sleep. Should I bring something cold?”

That shitty sounding English grated on his ears. “There’s some water in the back of the fridge.” He really wanted some water right now. His stomach acid was crawling up the back of his throat and the inside of his mouth was dry. His brain was still hazy. But he was at least thankful that he had been stopped right before heading over the cliff. He uncurled his fist, and then clenched it again. It was slight, but he was able to put some strength into it.

Several months prior, as the era stands at the precipice of change, Law is trapped, alone in his own corner of the world. Demoted from the Major Leagues, his life turns destructive. He screams that the world is against him, but no one is there to answer. He writhes about, and then loses all hope. Forced to ride a Core Booster, little more than a metal coffin, as a participant in the high speed “Nimrod Races,” both his body and soul are broken. Law lives in terror of the speed that’s permeated every bit of his body. It is at this moment that A-Bao appears to him.

With it came the return of a tiny amount of confidence. Spreading from his fist, to his entire body…to his spirit. A-Bao was standing in front of the refrigerator. He was completely defenseless. *Kill him now.* An inner voice urged him on frantically. He couldn't do it though. His body wasn't moving. For a brief instant, he had the feeling that A-Bao could see right through him. Looking at the side of his face, it looked like A-Bao laughed. Just an illusion.

"Do you like Giant Buddhas?" A-Bao asked as he handed him some mineral water. He was holding something in his other hand. A figurine of the Giant Buddha, a small souvenir Law had bought on a trip with Miharu. For some reason, that was the only thing he couldn't bring himself to throw away. Looking at it brought him a small amount of calm, he couldn't explain why. *Get your hands off that.* He tried to shout but his parched throat couldn't produce the words. He took the glass from A-Bao, and downed over half of its contents in one go. The mineral water quenched his body. He was fully awake now. A-Bao spoke.

"I have something better than Giant Buddhas. You should be able to handle it. Want to try?"

Law couldn't tell what A-Bao was getting at. *This guy's out to ruin me too*. That's how he took it. Warnings were going off in his head. The inner voice was getting louder. It was too loud. *Don't come near me*, he thought angrily. But A-Bao kept talking.

"Things happening now, things going to happen, things we must do. I'll tell you everything." The cocky, mischievous sparkle had disappeared from the green eyes. They looked at him clearly. "There's something I want you to do."

The sound of the alarms stopped. However, there was a different sound in the back of his mind now. The cocking of a hammer. A heavy, metal sound. He was excited. It didn't seem like he'd be able to contain himself.

“What.” Opening his mouth, Law replied without thinking, unable to hold back.

“Steal a Machining Skin from the Anti-Earth Union Group.”

The alarm bells. The sound of a hammer cocking.

The majority of events do not happen out of the blue, but instead result when things large and small accumulate together, and then get released into the world by some type of catalyst. Just like how it takes time for the filthy rain water pooling on your roof to cause a leak.

It was the same way with anger. Even in cases of so-called spontaneous outbursts, there was always a fuse. The difference was whether it was visible or not.

That’s how Law viewed things.

The warning bells. The cocked hammer. There was no mistaking that the fuse was already burning. That’s why it was too late.

A fist connected with a nose. Law’s fist. A-Bao’s face. He punched him with everything he had. Someone grunted. He could feel the man’s nose breaking. He hit, and hit again. Until he had beaten him into a bloody pulp. Completely. Exhaustively. He heard a voice speaking English to him in a thick accent. He returned to his senses. It was A-Bao.

“Everything is for the future.”

Law felt himself turning pale. He was terrified. There was blood coating his fists. The table was broken. The glass was broken. There was debris scattered everywhere.

A-Bao…was sitting on the sofa, peering at the figure of the Giant Buddha. Completely normally, as if nothing had happened. Unsurprised, just sitting.

“Turning Dive and Empath into Intuition, I entered your mind. Everything you saw was in your head. Just a little fun with my ability. I can’t do it too much though.” A-Bao said.

Law had no idea what had just happened. He stared at A-Bao’s eyes. They appeared implausibly clear. A pair of illusory eyes. It was like all the blood in his body had frozen.

“P-please, explain it again in words that I can understand. What did you just do to me?” Law begged like a clingy child.

A-Bao sat there, his expression unchanged. And then he started to explain everything.

–

“*Wilbur* will take the lead while the two *Orvilles* provide support from behind. Once we’re clear of the harbor we’ll make our escape at maximum speed. Marker, Oscar, the enemy ship should still be around somewhere, so if you spot it make sure you report it at once.” On the sub-bridge, Bright Noah spoke to the two operators stationed at their posts.

As the proper chain of command had been lost, there was no one else to take control of the *Pegasus* aside from Bright and these two. Since most of the operations could be left to the computer, it wasn’t completely out of the question for three people to handle the *Pegasus*.

However, taking into account the lack of turret gunners, artillery crew or other missing roles, it was an unrealistic arrangement. Above all, the key instrument to steering the ship was its wheel, which was embedded in the *Pegasus*‘

navigation system located in the lower floor of the center of the sub bridge. And the absence of a helmsman to control it was particularly difficult.

Bright thought back regretfully to the misfortune that had befallen a certain woman a half year ago. Mirai Eyland-Yashima. An experienced helmsman staying aboard the *Pegasus* who no longer had the ability to walk.

Chapter Dossier:

–*Pegasus* Sub Bridge System

The sub bridge on the *Pegasus* is located in the center of its second hull, within the distinctive barrel-shaped shield ring. Despite its name, the capability to steer and control the ship's weapon systems are almost identical compared to the main bridge. The sub bridge is much smaller, so the 360 degree view screen on the main bridge has been scaled down. It only has enough capacity for the captain and a few ranking officers, the bare minimum of personnel required to control the ship. Designed for operation in zero-g, the captain's seat is mounted to the ceiling. Similarly, the operator seats on either side are attached to rails on the left and right side walls via crane arm. Rather than a chair, each of these seats is more like a device that secures its occupant in place. The seat for the helmsman is mounted into the floor.

As the *Pegasus* also uses the knocking method of attitude control, its helm implements the navigational system found in the CORE standard of space-going cockpits. The sub bridge lacks a dedicated captain's room, so the captain is quartering in the officer ready room. However, this is a problem as access to the sub bridge from the ready room is particularly inconvenient.

Chapter 7 "Children of the New Century–The Kids Are Alright"

The story so far: A-Bao is a pilot candidate assigned to the battleship *Pegasus*, currently en route to a space colony to receive a new model of space combat weapon, the Machining Skin "Gunboy." Thanks to an innate ability of premonition known as "Forecast," he sees a vision of the expected future, as well as his own death and begins moving to prevent it.

His premonition shows three Machining Skins, Blondies, of unknown affiliation attempting to steal the Gunboy, and so A-Bao goes ahead alone in order to board the Gunboy first and stop the theft, going AWOL for the sake of achieving his goals. But just as he thinks everything is going smoothly the operation starts to go massively awry when he is betrayed by the mercenary known as "Slugger" Law.

At this moment, the *Pegasus* is preparing to escape from the colony. However attacks from the enemy ship have resulted in catastrophic damages, leaving the *Pegasus* with no chain of command and without so much as a helmsman. Appointed as acting captain, Bright Noah agonizes over his responsibilities.

Mirai Eyland-Yashima Makes Her Appearance!

Spoken Fragments of Information; A World Still Unseen…

Is the Grand Experience being Portrayed Through A-Bao's Death?

The explosion of the *Blondie*, in addition to the later mega particle cannon attack that had penetrated the colony's four-sided core, had left both the space colony and the Earth Federation's newest battleship, *Pegasus,* heavily damaged.

"Once we've brought aboard the surviving *Orvilles*, incinerated the remains of the destroyed Machining Skins and rescued the evacuees we can get out of this colony. Wilbur will take the lead while the two Orvilles provide support from behind. Once we're clear of the harbor we'll make our escape at maximum speed." The young ensign Bright Noah, forced to take charge as a result of the lost chain of command, spoke to the other two people taking up positions on the sub bridge. Marker Clan. Oscar Dublin. There was no one else to operate the ship aside from Bright and these two.

"Marker, Oscar. The enemy ship probably won't come after us now that it's lost its Blondies. But just in case you spot it, make sure to report it at once." They had to assume that the ship behind the mega particle attack was still out there.

The majority of the battleship's operations could be left to the computer, so it wasn't out of the question for three people to handle the *Pegasus*. However, when taking into account turret gunners or artillery crew or any of the other necessary roles a military ship needed, it quickly became an impractical solution.

More than anything else they were hurt by the lack of a helmsman to handle the ship's wheel, a key piece of equipment for steering the *Pegasus,* mounted in the lower floor of the sub bridge along with the rest of the navigation systems. Taken to the extreme, you could even argue that the *Pegasus*' equine shape was rendered meaningless without one.

As you couldn't acquire a ready supply of propellant when in space, electricity was used as the most stable source of locomotive power, together with the attitude regulation system known as Active Mass Balance Auto-Control, or AMBAC for short.

This made use of the impulse and reaction generated when moving a single portion of the craft's mass, allowing for attitude control without the use of a reaction wheel (or control moment gyroscope). Some of the types of AMBAC invented utilize the movement and collisions of ballast mounted along a rail, or from swinging the machine's limbs. From the way these varieties functioned, this came to be referred to as "Knocking Movement."

Compared to the method that relied on reaction wheels, knocking allowed for faster and more agile adjustments, and as entire portions of the craft worked as ballast, the space required for gyros disappeared, leading to the wider adoption of smaller scale spacecraft. Normally knocking would be handled automatically through software, but depending on the skill of the user, specifically those with long term experience in weightless environments and good spatial awareness, it was possible to be operated manually.

However, this wasn't applicable to the general population, and since it didn't have much in the way of widespread utility there were very few ships or machining workers that were built with the capability for manual control.

When it came to the *Pegasus* though, not only could the knocking ballast inside the ship's ring be adjusted manually, but even the catapults could be controlled as ballast, allowing the ship to exhibit a much higher degree of maneuverability than its peers. Due to that, the ship's steering system was based on the spacefaring CORE standard of cockpits.

Of course, operation under gravity wasn't a consideration. The Spacenoids, along with those possessing highly developed spatial awareness, had tuned it to focus on space combat alone. Gunboy *Wilbur* and the *Orvilles* shared the same set of ideological values. Even with automatic control enabled, these weren't crafts that the uninitiated would be able to handle.

In the meantime, It was urgent that Bright and Marker find someone who had experience as a helmsman.

There was Mirai Eyland-Yashima. She was the eldest daughter of the esteemed Yashima family and her father was a well-known politician. Bright had only ever spoken to her once, a very long time ago. His father was a politician as well, and it had happened when he brought the younger Noah along to a party of government dignitaries.

That was back when Bright was still living his life without trying to escape the burden of the family name. Even as a child, he was more than dazzled by Mirai as a member of the opposite sex. A young girl with a gentle face, who had grown up bathed by the sun's grace, the breeze blowing against her cheeks and beloved by all around her. And yet as they talked he could occasionally see a powerful inner strength emanating from her.

It was an encounter that remained with him even now. It was a pleasant memory. But that hadn't been the only reason for his excessive shock when he found her name on the roster of student call-ups. Listed in her educational history was the note that she was licensed to fly a space glider, as well as the fact that she had experience as a ship's helmsman.

Unfortunately, his excitement disappeared as soon as he learned of her current circumstances. The accident had happened during training, and its resolution was unfortunate, brought on by Mirai's strong sense of personal responsibility. The plan had been for her to disembark at *Noah* in order to get the physical rehabilitation she needed. Mirai had lost the ability to use her legs. She could no longer walk.

Bright thought about it a lot. About meeting that girl when he was young. About tripping and falling over at the party and the intelligent eyes of the girl who extended her hand out to him. He passed a comb over his head, slicked with hair cream to keep everything in place. An unusual action for him. He pressed the button on the room's intercom. There were children's voices coming from the other end. That she hadn't holed up alone in her room even in an emergency like this was testament to her conscientious nature.

After a moment, one of the children came to answer the door. There were wounded in the room as well. In a corner of the jumble, a woman was lying down against a scanner. It was without a doubt, Mirai Eyland-Yashima. She looked exactly as if the girl from back then had become an adult.

"It's been some time, Ensign Bright."

It was a beautiful voice, calm and low. Bright was thankful that she remembered who he was. But as soon as he saw her face he averted his eyes. It wasn't that he was trying to turn away from her injuries. To put it simply, he was embarrassed. She let out a small laugh, as if she could tell. Bright felt like he was the one being rescued. Mirai spoke.

"The CORE standard used in the *Pegasus*' steering will work as long as you can move your hips. I'll probably have to rely a bit on the automatic supports though… Would you lend me your shoulder until we reach the bridge? After all, there's no one else to take the helm, correct?"

Bright had to fight back his tears. There was no need to explain anything to her. Based on the circumstances and her own skills, Mirai had completely figured things out on her own. Even without the use of her legs the impression she gave off was exactly the same as it had been back then. Standing in front of the unchanging Mirai, Bright couldn't help but feel sullied.

The Noah family pedigree. And the incident that made him decide to leave home. The reason he decided to join the military that night. Confronted with Mirai's positivity, everything about his past felt shameful.

"I have to go to work now, okay?" She patted the head of the child nestled up to her. This woman was stronger, and more beautiful than anyone else in the world. The rank pin on his chest felt heavy. He couldn't be blamed for wanting to pull it off.

□

A-Bao hadn't been given a chance to get out of *Wilbur*. He had to get the unscathed Orvilles into the *Pegasus* and provide assistance with the evacuees. Not to mention that it was extremely handy having a sixteen meter tall giant around to transport materials and help out the colony repair team. As soon as he had gone over his one hour break the alert on his communication monitor started flashing, and a bespectacled man appeared on screen. There didn't seem to be any senior officers in the *Pegasus*' control block. Seeing Warrant Officer Marker's face peering into the monitor was proof enough of that.

"A-Bao, the *Pegasus* is going to be leaving the colony shortly. Go on ahead of us and we'll have the Orville units circle around to the rearguard. Think you can handle that?"

“Huh? Who do you think you’re talking to? Both the Machining Skin and the pilot you’ve got are more than capable enough. Keep your concerns to your own end, I’m hanging up.” Cutting off the transmission, he let out a sigh of relief. It felt good, that kind of private conversation. It brought him a sense of tranquility.

A-Bao was a soldier. A pilot of a machine designed for slaughter. He was also called an Esper. Sometimes that word would be said in celebration, and other times it would be accusatory. He believed he had seen, heard and experienced many more things than any of the others. He had foreseen his own death and he still had an unshakeable resolve. That’s why he had survived up to this point, intending to pass on everything he had. Himself. Everything that he wouldn’t be able to accomplish.

Despite all that, he was still only 17 years old. A boy seeking love and warmth from his interactions with people. When he was talking with Marker in that stupid, immature way he felt like he could see the part of himself that was human. It definitely wasn’t an uncomfortable feeling. It was nice. But the thought that it was eventually going to vanish brought on an overwhelming sadness. That was the vision he had.

An electric powered “Elecar,” a van type, came skidding towards A-Bao and Wilbur from the direction of B Block. It was carrying around twenty elderly, women and children, and they all craned their heads to look up at the Machining Skin. A-Bao picked up the Elecar with Wilbur, carrying it over to the lift.

It was about fifteen minutes later. The colony’s four sided airlock had been opened, and the *Pegasus* was underway. The time had come to leave *Noah.* Mirai bit her lip as she sat at the helm, her previous smile gone. Everyone here had undergone some level of training, but it didn’t change the fact that they were a ragtag bunch of rookies. And on top of that, this was a cutting edge ship. The crew’s anxiety levels were through the roof.

“The harbor laser sensors will handle things. Just take it easy.” Bright gave Mirai a pat on the shoulder. Really, he was scared of staying silent. As the sort of person who always had to be doing something, he was losing his nerve.

Ahead of them, the Earth sparkled against the Sun. Squinting hard enough should have revealed the Earth Federation Space Force’s front line base, Luna II, inside of that blinding light, but it too had melted into the radiance. Right now, they were in outer space.

“Marker, where’s the enemy ship?” Bright still hadn’t calmed down. It wasn’t just him. Every single person on board this ship was nervous.

“It should have been in the shadow of the colony, but I c-can’t pick it up!” Marker’s agitated voice echoed shrilly through the bridge. Bright turned on his intercom, shouting to the entire ship.

“Full speed ahead! Open the rear missile ports! All blocks double check hull pressurization.” Bright seemed to be slightly different. Ever since seeing Mirai he had begun to think a little about how he could live without being ashamed of his life. To start with, he was determined to focus on nothing else but commanding the ship. “How far are we from the colony?”

“Two, three kilometers.” Marker sounded like he was beginning to settle down. It wasn’t that he was relaxed, only that he was getting adjusted to the extreme level of anxiety. It only took a look at how pale his face still was for proof.

“Are the two Orvilles behind us able to keep up?” Bright spoke out loud to no one in particular. There was no reply. It was perfectly understandable. No one else on the bridge knew the answer.

Gunboy *Orville*. The fourth Machining Skin developed as part of the Gunboy series line. The two prototypes assigned to the *Pegasus* went by their individual code numbers of C108 and C109, piloted by Koo “YC” Deng and Hayato

Subayashi respectively. Equipped with two recoilless cannons, the Orville prototype featured various improvements as the Wilbur's successor machine, as well as some material differences in construction. Because the cannons were mounted to the Orville's shoulders, the knocking mechanism in the arms had been changed out for a simplified version, leading to a drastic dip in the unit's mobility. However, the peaky handling characteristics of the Wilbur were also tamed, making it a much easier machine for the average pilot to handle.

"This is C108. No problems keeping up." Koo's machine. The voice sounded upbeat. Bright was reassured to hear that he had another hardy crew member.

Ahead, Wilbur's monitor had picked up an approaching enemy. Even in the presence of Minovsky particles the laser sensors remained reasonably accurate. However, it still didn't count as "confirmation" until spotted with the naked eye.

That was what had been thoroughly drilled into A-Bao during his training on the *Pegasus*. Whatever the approaching object the sensor had picked up, it was coming in fast. Too fast to be a battleship. Based on mass it was closer to a Machining Skin, but there was nothing in the *Pegasus*' database that matched it.

"Get the anti-air guns ready!" Bright shouted.

As he watched the light, approaching so quickly it looked as if it was zooming past star after star, A-Bao was attacked by a sudden chill. The crawling sensation over his skin, which should have been gone by now, flared up again.

"Aaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!!!" He screamed, like he was trying to shake free from the feeling. Wilbur pulled sharply to the right, and A-Bao's body was hit by the g's. There was a brief second where his consciousness faded, but the CORE standard kept it to nothing more than that. If not for the cockpit seat, his spinal cord would have shattered.

Information poured in from one of the displays, but A-Bao didn't have the time to read most of it.

It was taking everything he had to follow the enemy on the main monitor. He shouted to the *Pegasus*.

"Get away from here!"

His gaunt-looking face appeared on the sub-bridge's screen, further evidence of how dire the situation was.

"Run!"

He shouted it one more time.

"Run!!!"

Chapter Dossier:

-The Original Four

Kuzco Al is the most “normal” of the O4. She lacks a sense of taste and has a strong masochistic streak. A woman subservient to Lalah.

Challia Bull is the only non-Machining Skin pilot among the O4. A man who gives off the air of a taciturn gentleman, but with an obsession for killing.

Lalah Sung, the youngest member of the O4. Even Challia can’t hold a candle to her bloodlust, and her existence continues to terrify the other three. Both her mind and body are unstable and she periodically falls into a comatose state as a result.

Cramble Karela leads the Crossbones, a team of 237 older commandos with a median age of 60. They often move independently, engaging in covert actions. He has a wife named Roseanne Kelly.

Chapter 8 “Wargame–The Girl’s Knife”

The story so far: Ling A-Bao is a pilot candidate assigned to the battleship *Pegasus*, currently en route to a space colony to receive a new model of space combat weapon: the Machining Skin “Gunboy.” Thanks to an innate ability of premonition known as “Forecast,” he sees a vision of three Machining Skins, Blondies, of unknown affiliation attempting to steal the Gunboy, and so A-Bao goes ahead alone in order to board the Gunboy first and prevent the theft.

Later on, the *Pegasus* is preparing to escape from the colony *Noah*, but attacks from the enemy ship have resulted in catastrophic damages, leaving the *Pegasus* with no chain of command and without so much as a helmsman. At this time, appointed acting captain Bright Noah meets Mirai Eyland-Yashima once again. Mirai has lost the use of her legs as a result of a training accident.

However, Mirai, who has experience steering a ship, declares herself the helmsman before he can ask. Bright is touched by her positive attitude. As the *Pegasus* leaves port they are attacked by an unrecognized enemy. Intimidated by its presence on an intuitive level, A-Bao is gripped by fear.

The Popular Series Continues!! A Visual Story Filled with New Sensations!!

Who is the Enemy Attacking A-Bao? The World is About to Speed up!

Year 39 of the Universal Century calendar. With the goal of ensuring the success of space emigration, the United Earth Assembly, the regulatory body governing a global consortium of nations, ratified the Article of Founder State Privilege.

This promised a permanent seat on the security council to the countries that were either involved with colony construction or contributed by providing large immigrant populations.

As a result of this agreement, the member states seeking more influence banded together to create new blocs of limited statehood in outer space, sharing their sovereignty. The fight for leadership of the Assembly came to be dominated by these factions, with the largest going by the name of the "Earth Federation."

The Earth Federation consists of many of the countries that built Barrels 1 and 2, and from the time of its founding it made up half of Assembly membership and held sixty percent of the security council's permanent seats, allowing for continual single party rule. As it constitutes a limited federation in outer space, military power is provided by member states on an individual level, but also overlaps with the United Multinational Defense Forces (UMDF, a treaty organization).

Although there is a Federal Army, Navy and Air Force, those branches mostly exist to assist the national military forces on an as needed basis, and even in space they only made up a portion of the treaty organization, with nothing in their appearance to distinguish them as an independent arm of the Federation.

However, against the backdrop of the success of Barrel 3's "Bloodless Revolution" in UC 58, the Earth Federation, sensing the rising tide of anti-Federation sentiment, not to mention the signs of military cooperation between Anti-Earth Union Group members and non-Federation states, created a unified body with a single chain of command, separate from its constituent armies, to act as a check.

This would be the Earth Federation Forces. Combining the national armies of its member states with the Federation's own military branches, the Earth Federation Forces numbered two million strong, but that number fell to 300,000 when looking at the Space Force by itself, and only 80,000 of those personnel could be considered actual combatants prepared to fight in outer space.

By the latter half of the UC 70s almost eighty percent of United Earth Assembly states were part of the Federation, and as the de facto governing body of the colonies it completely oversaw space immigration. From the colonists' point of view, the Federation was the embodiment of the very will of the Earth Sphere itself, leading people to see it as the "Earth side." However, to those living on Earth the Federation was nothing more than a collection of nations, nothing like the monolithic entity that those in space saw it as. Nor did they consider that those in space might have believed much differently.

As the single largest national army, the Earth Federation Forces claimed the right to represent the treaty organizations of the Assembly. It used that position to exert pressure on Barrel 3, moving away from the behind the scenes support roles of the past. This took the shape of weapons development, focused on the possibility of space warfare on a cross-national level, something that had never been considered to this point. It was here that the Earth Federation Forces were reframed to fit the concept of a "space military." However, the Federation's heavy-handed moves were roundly criticized by non-party states, and only ended up increasing their backing for Barrel 3 as a counterbalance, and later, means of resistance.

The majority of this support was channeled into the Anti-Earth Union Group, which was growing in size and power by the day. Many of the members of the AEUG were idealists subscribing to the theory of "Streamers," which purported that space would be the birthplace of humanity's reformation. They were united by their belief in this transformation, and in the cause of their fight.

Right now, A-Bao and his companions were being pursued by the very existence those acolytes for the new humanity worshiped. One of the Original Four, the unit reporting directly to the Flanagan Institute: **Lalah Sung**.

From the frontline, A-Bao's scream rang out from the Wilbur and through the sub bridge of the *Pegasus*. Still, Bright was unable to react. There was no way that he could understand that the danger behind A-Bao's warning was right in front of them. The same went for Marker. Nerves, and a lack of experience. It was these two factors that prevented them from responding to the situation. A-Bao's frantic shouts seemed like little more than something moving in the far off distance.

Unsurprisingly, Mirai was the one who took action. She might have been injured, but that wouldn't stop her from protecting this ship with her entire being.

The CORE seat locking her waist and torso in place effectively turned her into the *Pegasus* itself. As a result, she could feel everything going on in its vicinity. A-Bao's voice was a strong push against her back, and without orders Mirai took evasive action.

She knew very well what her decision meant.

She would be defying the acting captain. However, right now Mirai was the ship. *She* was carrying 105 civilian lives inside of her, and she would protect those frightened people, no matter who she made as an enemy. That was who she was. Mirai Eyland-Yashima. At that moment, this woman was stronger than anyone else there.

Furthermore, the person who quickly picked up on her actions and moved to wholeheartedly provide backup was none other than the withdrawn operator Oscar Dublin, who still had not taken his eyes away from his monitor once.

Oscar's heart had been filled. His feelings. The urge to protect Mirai. That was all there was to it. The quiet boy had fallen in love at first sight, his first love. Oscar Dublin's response was a genuine, heartfelt expression of love.

Mirai was grateful.

Wilbur's shot arced through the darkness of space, a brilliant white ray pulling a comet-like tail behind it. However, the beam passed behind the enemy shadow, which continued to approach A-Bao's Machining Skin. If he had been watching the path of his own fire, A-Bao would never have found the shadow. He had known from the moment he touched the trigger that he would never hit it, so instead he concentrated on widening his focal point.

The enemy craft veered hard to the left, stunning him with what looked to be a ninety degree turn. He pressed his upper body instinctively against the locking seat in an attempt to keep his enemy centered in front. Instantly he felt the weight pushing against him as he was spun around. It felt like his lungs were being flattened. Just endure it.

Good.

Even though the seat he was affixed to groaned and protested, sounding like it was on the verge of breaking apart, A-Bao held on, his feet pushing the floor pedals as far as they would go.

Neither Wilbur's performance nor A-Bao's reflexes could be called anything close to normal, but when it came to the enemy's quick and fluid motions, undulating like a stingray, they just couldn't keep up. On top of that, the stingray was releasing some type of smaller flying objects, and the attacks from these objects was pushing A-Bao towards crisis. His frustrations boiled over.

“Shiiiiiit!” A-Bao hadn’t stopped trembling yet. On the contrary, it had spread all the way down to his toes, and he was sure he felt it seeping into his organs now.

Terror—the face of the girl hovering in the depths of his mind wouldn’t go away. That was enough to confirm for him that she was the enemy pilot. That was why his body was reacting to “something” it remembered, and that was why he was being toyed with.

Both his irritation and his fear were being pushed to the limit. The smaller things kept attacking. Numerous explosions. He felt like his consciousness was about to break away. Despite everything going on, he didn’t miss the fuzzy ping that had appeared on his IFF monitor. It was about four degrees above the stingray, relative to his line of fire.

A Machining Skin. A Blondie. It was the unit that had been thrown from the colony during the earlier blast. It was possible that the pilot was signaling to avoid being misidentified or interrupting the fight, but broadcasting the powerful laser signal in all directions was nothing short of suicidal.

After following the stingray’s movements the careless Blondie didn’t seem even half as nimble to A-Bao’s eyes. Without hesitation he fired twice, so quickly that it appeared to come out as a single beam, and hit the Blondie directly in the abdomen. “One down!”

With such an enormous burst of light the Wilbur’s monitor went to work automatically. The filter switched on, and the bright white ring was slowly erased. It was a moment of elation, as A-Bao felt the swelling fanfare within his chest, and then an instant later the fear was back.

The monitor, back to normal operation now, showed the stingray bearing down on him at incredible speed. Using what little courage he had left to stifle his tremors, A-Bao squeezed firmly around the control stick poking up between his legs, pulling the trigger again in shock.

“Its energy output has increased!!!”

The terror ran through his entire body. In that moment, he could see death in front of him. It appeared on his screen, in the shape of a stingray.

He couldn’t even move. There was nothing he could do.

Several blasts struck the stingray. They came from *Pegasus*' direction. The ship had saved A-Bao’s life. “Aaaaaaaaaaaah!” The fear inside him burst apart.

Deftly dodging the incoming fire, the stingray retreated from the battlefield at high speed.

It was only then that A-Bao realized he had a warm feeling spreading around his groin. No two ways about it, he’d pissed himself. Hell, His teeth were still chattering.

In a certain sense, it was worse than dying. Today was the day that the terror which had been hiding deep in his memories became real. The girl had plunged her knife deep into A-Bao’s core. That fear had been growing larger inside him day by day. It had taken root deep within his heart, eventually becoming a curse.

When he returned to the *Pegasus*, he couldn’t even hear Bright’s words of appreciation to him.

There was a feeling of relief aboard the *Pegasus*. Nevertheless, people were still running around. There were wounded to tend to and damage that needed to be assessed.

In the midst of that rush, one person stood out more than anyone else. Beautiful golden hair. Conspicuous alabaster skin.

Sayla Mass, twenty years old.

Two years ago, in 0077, she had arrived at Noah by herself. With most space immigration now compulsory, it was unusual to find anyone who had chosen to leave Earth willingly. Sayla was one of them.

By then, the only people still living on Earth were those with conservative attachments to the planet, or those with ties to the Earth Federation government. Determined to become a doctor, Sayla had enrolled in a nursing school intended to provide medical staff for the future Sides as soon as colony construction began. From there, she moved to *Noah*.

Then the war broke out.

Sayla was not exempt from it. She was drafted into the military, certified as a radio operator, and recently recommended for a civilian posting. Female soldiers were particularly common in the supply and signal corps, and the military was always hungry for talent.

But Sayla had stubbornly turned it down.

It went back to the reason she had chosen to immigrate in the first place: **it had been her choice.**

Still, something happened that shook her resolve.

The enemy Machining Skin raid.

Stationed at the testing site, Sayla had gathered her data files and left her post moments after the first Blondie attacked. The files contained only encrypted unit

communications, nothing particularly valuable, but she had been ordered to destroy them at the cost of her life if anything went wrong.

She dipped the files in acid, made certain that the rest of the squad had left nothing behind, and prepared to make for the evacuation point.

Normally, in an emergency, she could have used the Air Defense Capsules to escape the Barrel, taking advantage of the colony's centrifugal force. But the system had been rendered inoperable by AEUG Blondie's earlier attack.

On her corporal's orders, everyone from the communications squad was to head for the *Pegasus* instead.

Sayla was headed for the port as well.

All around her, the everyday scenery had been reduced to an unbelievable state of destruction.

The unfamiliar sound of explosions.

Thick black smoke.

That awful stench.

“What a terrible sight…” The leftover radiation from the explosion of a reactor used inside a Machining Skin or ship wasn’t enough to be concerned about. That was what she had been taught. However, that was only speaking comparatively. She knew that too. “I have to survive.” Sayla hurried on.

She spotted a man’s outline in the shadow of a half-collapsed building. The pilot suit he wore—she recognized it from an EFF information bulletin. It belonged to the Anti-Earth Union Group. He was tall. His hair was long, his bangs hiding his eyes almost completely.

The man hired by A-Bao to steal a Blondie and sneak into *Noah*, only to then betray him, was standing right there.

Chapter Dossier:

–*Musai*-class Light Cruiser

The primary battleship of the AEUG fleet. With a total length of 234 meters, these ships were designed and constructed in secret under the watch of the Flanagan Institute. “Constructed” is a bit of a misnomer, as these are *Muse*-class cargo ships that have been converted into combat use.

Although inferior compared to the purpose-built battleships of the Earth Federation, they have the advantage of being able to be mass produced at a low cost. The two knocking arms on the port and starboard sides have each been equipped with a mega particle cannon. The transportation capabilities of the base *Muse*-class have been retained, primarily used to carry Machining Skins.

The mounting system for the Quicksilver model of machining workers has been reused for storing the Blondie, its direct descendent. One *Musai*-class can carry three Blondies to form one platoon. The reinforced armor plating, expanded sensor package, missile containers and other additions around the bridge give it a unique profile, but the relatively unchanged shape of the rest of the ship leads to it often being mistaken for a *Muse*-class, making it an ideal platform to carry out surprise attacks.

–*Muse*-class Freight Transport

A cargo freighter designed by the corporate administration of Barrel 3. Primarily used to carry helium gas, these ships boast the largest payload of any civilian transport.

The lower section of the hull holds the gas tanks and machining worker bays, as well as storage areas equipped to handle a wide variety of container standards. The fairings covering the ship are Whipple shields, and the internal cooling system also helps to serve as a heat resistant layer.

The knocking attitude control system found on both sides to the aft of the vessel was also reproduced for the mechanism in the Blondie’s arms.

Chapter 9 “Original Story–The Cold Teat”

The story so far: A-Bao is a pilot cadet assigned to the battleship *Pegasus*, currently en route to a space colony to receive the new model of space combat weapon, the Machining Skin “Gunboy.” Thanks to an innate ability of premonition known as “Forecast,” he sees a vision of three Machining Skins, Blondies, of unknown affiliation attempting to steal the Gunboy, and so A-Bao goes ahead alone in order to board the Gunboy first and prevent the theft.

Later on, the *Pegasus* is preparing to escape from the colony *Noah*, but attacks from the enemy ship have resulted in catastrophic damages, leaving the *Pegasus* with no chain of command and without so much as a helmsman. Despite the loss of movement in her legs, Mirai Eyland-Yashima volunteers to take the helm. As the *Pegasus* leaves port they are attacked by an unrecognized enemy. Intimidated by its presence on an intuitive level, A-Bao is gripped by terror. Although saved by the *Pegasus* in the nick of time, the fear of death has been embedded within him, and after returning to the ship he loses consciousness…

Meanwhile, Sayla comes face-to-face with the object of A-Bao’s ire: Slugger Law.

The Castaways set off on Their Journey in the Midst of an Unseeable Frenzy—

At Last, a Visual Story for the New Era Begins!!

Bringing Stimulation Over Emotion, Destruction Over Story!!

“Keep your hands up where I can see them. Take off your helmet. I won’t hesitate to shoot.” Sayla’s voice was cold. The barrel of her gun was steady. Law immediately recognized that he was in trouble.

This woman had no qualms about killing someone. Even if he was mistaken, he could see that she was at least prepared to kill.

“Aren’t you a tough one? Impressive.” Law did as he was instructed. Removing his helmet, Law’s long blonde hair whipped around in the wind. As someone

who grew up on Earth, he didn't like the idea of going helmetless, even inside a space colony.

After taking a timid breath, his expression changed to relief.

"…You're not with the AEUG, are you? Right?" Sayla watched his face closely.

"What makes you say that?"

"Being fearful about taking off your helmet. No spacenoid would ever act like that. Also…"

"Also?"

"Those zealots don't despair over being alive. Or at the very least, they find meaning in living. You don't have that. You've given up all hope. In the world, and in yourself. Am I wrong?"

Law could sense something like a radiant energy behind her moistened eyes. And, it was getting increasingly stronger. As he stared, his eyes began to wander, unconsciously he began to undress her with his eyes.

At that moment, there was a bang, and the world shook. A searing pain ran through his right leg. Smoke. The smell of gunpowder. Sayla had pulled the trigger. Blood spurted from his leg, and the pain became extreme.

"Y-you bitch!"

"Hurry up and get that pilot suit off, we don't have a lot of time. You're a wounded civilian who was shot by someone with the AEUG, and I saved you. I'm taking you to the *Pegasus*. Understand?"

"…Why the HELL would I go along with that!?" His face was contorted in agony. "Y-you're in cahoots with that Taiwanese brat, aren't you!?" Paranoia took hold of him, but Sayla wasn't worried. On the contrary, she leaned in closer, putting her captivating face next to his.

"I don't really care if I have to kill you here or not." She narrowed distance, yet never met, her lips over his own. Even through his pilot suit he could feel the contours of her body, almost as clearly as if he was using his bare hands.

"You really want to die in a place like this?" Her voice was syrupy and seductive. More pain. The blood was pouring out of his leg. It was a delicious mixture of pleasure and pain.

"Not too bad for an injured man…" She pressed her thigh against his hot, swollen cock. "Once your leg's been treated you can do whatever you like, but you aren't going to disobey me. That's what this guy's telling me." She pressed even harder.

Panting breaths. Even more blood. Law did as he was told. He couldn't do anything else. What really made him obey though, was the fact that Sayla hadn't taken the barrel of her gun off of his temple for even an instant.

That was how the two of them made it to the *Pegasus*. No one suspected anything, because everyone was too preoccupied with their own self-preservation.

Twenty minutes before departure, Law's hot blood was welling up from the pit of his stomach as a rush of ecstasy surged through him.

His lower half couldn't get away from that heat, that stickiness, the softness of those lips. The sparkle in Sayla's eyes was even stronger now. However, there was darkness even deeper inside. A silent shadow. A deep, leaden blackness. It was similar to the darkness inside A-Bao. That's what Law thought.

Once your leg's been treated you can do whatever you like, but you aren't going to disobey me

They met later, Sayla's reddened lips sparkled in the darkness, swirling her tongue. Making eye contact with Law, being engulfed in a wet heat, The sound of a hammer cocking. For some reason, it all reminded him of the sound of warfare.

♦

105 civilians had been taken aboard the *Pegasus*.

The greatest advantage of a solar powered colony was that once it was up and running, it could continue to operate in near perpetuity, as long as its internal ecological systems continued to cycle and its basic materials were reused and recycled.

Of course, it was still a man made structure, not a perpetual motion machine. But compared to the other energy sources available on Earth this was considered to be an enormously more stable method, as long as the Sun still existed.

Obviously, there was no way to prove the absolute safety of a colony, but even with a hole or two in its exterior, as long as the bare minimum of administrative functionality was still operational it was unthinkable that the basic support systems would fail.

Certainly no one believed that a colony would lose its atmosphere and be rendered uninhabitable.

Despite those assurances, many of the civilians were terrified, frantically pushing one another aside as they insisted on being let onto the *Pegasus*. Frau Bohr, Kitamoto Kikka, Fu Sing Letz and Fu Sing Katz were part of that number.

This being a warship, civilians would have normally been turned away, but not only did the vessel no longer have enough personnel to handle even that, some of the few surviving crew members even assisted the civilians in boarding, revealing their ignorance and inexperience as soldiers.

As a result, it was no great surprise that a few of the crew were getting into fights with their guests and each other as they were constantly being pestered for hospitable treatment and warm soup, with no time to even wipe the sweat from their faces.

Only a fraction of the happenings on board the ship reached Bright's ears, but it was enough to make his heart sink. Every single person here was self-centered, doing their own thing.

Faced with this mass of concentrated selfishness, Bright, who had just asked to be brought a cup of coffee, felt downright respectable in comparison. And to top it off, another self-centered person had shown up to test his goodwill. This gray-haired geezer is currently shouting angrily at him over the chaotic sub-bridge. His name was Jarla Amov, and he said he had served as captain of the heavy cruiser *Buchanan*.

"Where is the captain of this ship! I'm not wasting my time with you! We're completely unprepared for combat! Green doesn't even begin to cover your lot!"

Marker was clearly shaken by the man who had suddenly shown up and immediately started yelling. He was a lieutenant colonel who had commanded the *Buchanan*, but he had been retired for more than ten years. Lt. Col. Amov was useless to them in this situation and Bright knew it, but his hands were already full and he wanted to avoid any more hassles at the moment.

"Captain Paolo is currently comatose, and the acting captain is working in his stead. If you don't have any business here, would you please mind leaving?" Bright was careful not to provoke the ancient soldier, but Jarla wasn't listening.

He didn't even seem to notice Oscar scowling at him. Seeing the boy's scrunched-up face Mirai giggled from her place at the helm.

"Leave the missiles to me. How do I get to the command post?"

"We're no longer under a combat alert. Please leave."

"What a load of nonsense! Who knows when the enemy will appear again!"

Exasperating.

"Things aren't like how they used to be. Nowadays the battlefield is more like it was before the age of radar. The application is completely different."

"I know that!"

"…I don't have the time to explain how the ship works. The command post is on the deck below us."

"Good!" His voice straining, the former commander begrudgingly turned away.

"There's a radar panel down there, but it doesn't do anything." Bright called out, but Jarla didn't reply.

♦

It was only a short time after the old man had left the sub bridge that the intercom chirped. Bright had a bad feeling about what was coming, and for good reason, it turned out. He set the receiver back down.

"Just now, I've received word that retired Lieutenant Colonel Jarla Amov, to whom we will be forever indebted, has died honorably in the line of duty."

The faces on the sub bridge stared at Bright in shock. On the way to his station, Jarla hit his head on a low ceiling and died. He didn't even make it to the command post. Some "former-commander" he was! Declared the crew silently.

"All hands, salute!" On Bright's order, everyone touched their fingertips to their foreheads. He sighed. In the end, he had still ended up with another hassle. If he had thought this was a possibility he would have made sure the old man had known how to use the corridor tow grips.

"That was imprudent." Noticing Bright's flippant expression, Mirai scolded him.

♦

"…I wonder when that coffee is getting here…" Trying to deflect, he felt something hot inside him. The stench of blood wafting through the ship might have given him the impression that nothing really mattered, but there was still the warmth of humanity to be found here.

Maybe, just maybe, this ship would be able to make it.

Thinking that, Bright waited for the polyethylene pouch containing his freeze-dried coffee to arrive.

The door opened.

It still wasn't his coffee. It was Sayla Mass.

♦

When A-Bao arrived back at the *Pegasus* he collapsed, falling into a deep, trance-like sleep. He had no memory of getting out of Wilbur's cockpit, or changing his soiled underwear.

Coming back, collapsing and then ending up in his current location. He didn't remember any of it. A dimly lit private room. This wasn't the group quarters he had shared with the other cadets until only a few days ago. He didn't know where he was, but his mind wasn't clear enough to try and figure it out. The inside of his head was still filled with fog.

Memories containing brief flashes of the future swirled together with reality. There was a pale body there, illuminated by the light of a wall mounted screen. A pair of eyes, both girlish and womanly. Even in his mental haze, they struck him as seductive. He didn't ask who she was, because he was too busy gawking.

Not to mention that if this was a dream, why ruin things by bringing reality into it? The boy had one, earnest wish. He wanted to let himself be intoxicated by every inch of her body.

A-Bao had a vague realization. It was Frau Bohr, the girl from his childhood. However, he didn't care about that. His reaction would have been the same no matter who it had been. The first time was always cruel to the other person. A-Bao, his thoughts sluggish, was drawn to her. He reached out and touched Fraw's naked breasts. Soft, with plenty of weight to them. A sweet sounding voice escaped her lips. A-Bao wrapped his arms around her as he tried to fight his way through the fog.

"My foolish A-Bao…imagine you saving the world, when you can't even save a single girl…" Frau whispered into his ear. It sounded to him like the polar opposite of her domineering screeches. The girl's wish was to be the only recipient of his love. For the petulant boy, always being pushed around, no idea of what to do with himself, there was no way it would ever reach.

I'm telling you. It's precisely because I can't save one person that I'll show you I can save the world.

He wanted to scream it from the depths of his heart. But in reality, he was being driven by his desire. He kept selfishly, in futility, thrusting as hard as he could.

♦

"Nice to meet you. My name is Warrant Officer Mirai Eyland-Yashima. Let's do our best together."

"I'm Chief Petty Officer Marker Clan. He's Sergeant Oscar Dublin. Our pleasure."

"Sayla Mass. Thanks for having me."

After explaining her work history Sayla had volunteered to serve as the comms operator. There was an overwhelming lack of manpower, so much that the people on the sub bridge couldn't even take a rest. They had no reason to refuse her offer. Of course, it helped that the person volunteering wasn't a certain retired commander.

"We're extremely short handed, so this really helps. If you hear anything from *Noah* or Luna II please relay the message immediately. I can deal with intra-ship communications directly on my side, but if things get too hairy you can handle things from over there." Still standing, Bright instructed Sayla, who was sitting in a jump seat next to the operator's station. He should probably have been in the captain's chair, but he found it easier to stay relaxed if he was on his feet.

"Understood, Ensign." No sooner had she replied than the soldier on her small monitor began to shout. "Opening the channel."

Sayla tried to see if she could sense a blood relative, out here somewhere in space. She knew it was dangerous to give in to grandiose fantasies, but she couldn't stop herself.

Sayla's search for her blood connection.

The person A-Bao was trying to find.

They were the same person, but that was something Sayla didn't know yet.

Chapter Dossier:

-Sayla Mass

“Destroy the place where I should be”—A woman who expertly wields her sexuality as a weapon, all to achieve that purpose. In addition to her multiple aliases, many things about her past are a mystery. Her radiant confidence sometimes results in other members of the same sex despising her. At a time when most space immigration is compulsory, volunteering to move to space willingly makes her an oddity. Determined to become a doctor, she enrolls in a nursing school designed to provide staff to the future sides as soon as colony construction begins, and from there she moves to *Noah*. At that point the war breaks out, and she is

drafted into the military. After evacuating to the *Pegasus* she encounters Lin A-Bao, and from there their fates entwine.

-Ram Dowai (General Purpose Pilot Suit)

Pegasus crew member and Mister Ball pilot. “This war is definitely going to end. The problem is how we live after that.” He’s a man thinking pragmatically about his own future. A gentle, brotherly type, although a bit old-fashioned in his beliefs.

-Earth Federation Forces Machining Worker “Mister Ball”

Developed for use in space colony construction, this space-use machining worker was responsible for rapid progress, thanks to its mobility coming from purely electrical means. Mister Balls are found in the colonies under Federation control. Features oversized, knocking focused arms as well as manipulators for detailed work. Starting with the Model I, four generations of the Mister Ball have been produced. The Model IV line entered production during wartime, and in addition to being utilizing a core block system it was also the first of the series to be armed. Although technically given the name “Fireball,” the overall changes to appearance were minimal, and most people continue to refer to them as Mister Balls. It has both excellent maneuverability and chassis rigidity, and the Earth Federation would design their Machining Skins using this Mister Ball as the basis.

Chapter 10 “Authenticity–My Fiction is Your Truth”

The story so far: Ling A-Bao is a pilot candidate assigned to the battleship *Pegasus*, currently en route to a space colony to receive the new model of space combat weapon, the Machining Skin “Gunboy.” Thanks to an innate ability of premonition known as “Forecast,” he sees a vision of three Machining Skins, Blondies, of unknown affiliation attempting to steal the Gunboy, and so A-Bao goes ahead alone in order to board the Gunboy first and prevent the theft.

After that, the *Pegasus* is trying to escape from the colony *Noah*, but attacks from the enemy ship have resulted in catastrophic damages, leaving the *Pegasus* with no chain of command and without so much as a helmsman. Despite the loss of movement in her legs, Mirai Eyland-Yashima volunteers to take the helm. As the *Pegasus* leaves port they are attacked by an unrecognized enemy. Intimidated by its presence on an intuitive level, A-Bao is gripped by terror, and although he is saved by the *Pegasus* in the nick of time, the fear of death has been implanted within him, and after returning to the ship he loses consciousness.

It’s at that time that Sayla Mass appears on the bridge…

“What will you do now? What if…” As he spoke, A-Bao turned to watch the three children excitedly playing with a magnetic chess board over in the corner of the mess hall.

It was still chaotic aboard the ship, as expected. However, now that the combat alert had been rescinded it gave everyone the small chance to catch their breath.

Frau had waited patiently for A-Bao to wake up and come out of the private room. There was a reason she needed to do this. It was something she had sensed when she touched him, something like a gut feeling. The truth was, she had been the one to crawl into his bed.

It was an unfathomable act, even for Fraw, but witnessing the hell of war had robbed her of her emotional stability, so much so that she was sure she would go crazy without the touch of a loved one. And then at the moment she touched his skin, she felt a powerful light emanating from somewhere else.

A golden light—overflowing with confidence. It gave off a particularly feminine scent. It didn't belong to the A-Bao of the present, but it dominated the A-Bao of the near future. Even as A-Bao held tightly to her, Frau could see him being stolen away by that light. Thanks to that anxiety she continued to stand in front of the door, frozen.

Even after his appearance her worries didn't go away. When the heavy door eventually opened, A-Bao emerged from the dimly lit room. There was no situation in which the complexion of his face could be called healthy. Seeing her concern, he reached out to touch her hair. Something compelled him to. But Frau pulled away. Because her hair was dirty. His fingertips felt slick. Her beautiful silver hair was coated with oil, and it had lost the luster it once had.

"I'm all dirty…plus I've been out in the bad air this whole time…" It was an embarrassing situation for any 17-year-old girl, no matter what the circumstances.

Through his hazy consciousness, A-Bao remembered wrapping himself around the girl in front of him again and again. *Was all of that a dream, or…* He repeated the question in his head, but he couldn't bring himself to ask her directly. The unique air of loneliness she once possessed, which had clung to her entire body, was gone, revealing a powerful desire to be monopolized in its place. Her attitude towards him told him everything.

At least that's what it felt like.

After going to the sub bridge for his orders, A-Bao was told to get something to eat and then go report to Machining Skin maintenance. Taking Frau with him, he headed to the canteen. With its low hanging ceiling, the cramped room was hardly a popular spot. The bloodstains still coating the floor forced one to imagine what this place had looked like only a few hours earlier.

“There’s talk of returning to Barrel 7, but everyone I know is gone now, plus the nursery facility here said that they’d look after the children until their parents can be found…”

“You planning to take care of those kids yourself? The parents are already dead, right?” It was no longer possible to reject the heartless words that might have been unacceptable in the past. For the same reason, it was also impossible for A-Bao to imagine the things Frau had seen since evacuating to the *Pegasus*. Maybe that had to do with why she had left only the meat on her tray, completely untouched.

“That’s what happens in a war… They could at least be conscripted to tighten bolts…or maybe not. I think I should get licensed in vehicle maintenance while I’m here. There’s no way I’m going to be a designer during a time like this. It’s impossible, I know it is.” Frau averted her eyes. A fashion designer. That had been her dream.

War.

He only realized when she said it. Certainly, this was a war. That’s what he had trained for. But the concept of war that he had in his head didn’t match up with what he was currently dealing with. It was the first time that he realized that this was a war.

“When all this is over…it will be over soon, right? When all of this is over we’ll be able to go back to how things used to be, won’t we?” A sincere question. But A-Bao, already aware of what was to pass, had no reply.

The proper future to come—While piloting the Machining Skin “Ghost,” a shot from an enemy MS lands a direct hit, and A-Bao dies in battle.

He had seen that grizzly vision repeat, again and again. That was his ability: Forecast. That was the ability that had made him into who he was today.

One day, A-Bao's Forecast showed him an image of *them*.

According to them, these were the labor pains that came with change.

They, who blindly pumped their fists in the air and waited for the next person to appear while saying things like "It will take a great many losses, in order to create a fertile soil capable of producing a life." Spirits high and drunk on their own cause, they rallied to action with guns in hand.

The Anti-Earth Union Government. With the financial support of the young billionaire Packdelia and the cooperation of the Flanagan Institute, their power expanded. They spoke at length about the legitimacy of these "labor pains," and they wanted to see them realized very badly.

Labor pains—the suffering that accompanies a birth. Conflict as a prelude to life—The price to pay for being born. A necessary evil.

What a childish belief.

"That sort of thinking is, in itself, questionable." If there had been even one person to raise such an objection, the world could have at least pretended to be a little bit better than it really was. However, there were no such voices forthcoming.

Although the group's one saving grace was their own awareness regarding the heavy crime of these unnatural "labor pains," avoiding the use of excuses like "divinely chosen sacrifices," the fact that nobody singled out these labor pains, free of any implanted embryo, was cause for despair.

Many of those content to leave the fighting to others were optimistic that an era of stability would come in due time. Choosing themselves to enter cryogenic hibernation they slept peacefully, discarding the idea of living through this

chaotic period in history. Apathy breeds powerlessness, powerlessness corrodes the human spirit, and a corroded spirit loses its sense of ownership.

Goodnight. When I wake again this will surely be a wonderful world.

And when the girl awakens, she says this to the prince.

“You weren’t at all what I was expecting. I’d like to have my wish back, please.”

All you asked for was for an illusory existence, drifting along like the mists and fog, and once the illusion has been granted from all that awaits is rejection and denial? That, and unreasonable requests.

“But you’re a prince, right? If you’re going to be a future king why aren’t you naked? I love the story about the naked king. Please get rid of those clothes.”

Quite hungry by now, the girl then says this.

“Why haven’t you brought me something good to eat yet? The food I ate here once upon a time was delicious…at least I’m sure it must have been.”

The girl bangs her fork against her plate, hungry for the tastes found in her idealized memories. The girl, selfish and greedy, runs the seven helpless dwarves ragged. They can do nothing but wait for the storm to pass.

That’s why the prince justifies the purge, saying that the labor pains are necessary.

The prince gives the girl an apple of deadly poison, and after tasting a single drop of its juice, she drops dead.

The seven dwarves approach the prince, who had delivered the poison apple in place of the queen.

Thank you, my lord. We couldn't figure out what to do about that girl's selfish ways.

The murderous hero pays no attention to the ones that sat and did nothing.

Perhaps these are "labor pains."

Perhaps this is the result of these "labor pains."

Perhaps this is "the fertile soil that can produce life."

A-Bao pondered. However, that was the future he saw when he looked at this era.

How absurd. In that case, why not take the position of the deposed queen? He thought about simply forcing the sleeping girl awake, jumping her in front of all the princes. And then, just before he was seized, he would take the iron shoes out of the fire and put them on, dancing away of his own volition. Clad in the iron shoes known as a Machining Skin up until the moment he died. Just watch. My dance will smash apart both this entire stupid world and that future.

Such thinking had led him to the present. But right now, he couldn't bear the thought of getting into the Machining Skin cockpit. The last battle had left a sticky, slimy, paralyzing layer of fear inside his subconscious. And now he was here, dining together with this girl.

"A-Bao…" Frau abruptly reached over and touched his frigid hand. It was the first time she had ever done that. "…Can I believe in you?"

It was as if the sudden words were trying to steal away his heart. He brushed her away impulsively. “Believe? About what?”

“A…A-Bao?”

“What would you believe in me for? Don’t count on me for anything!”

“I’m sorry…” She trembled. Taken aback by his emotional outburst, all she could do was apologize.

“What do you know about what I’m going through right now!? I’m scared! I’m scared to get into a Machining Skin and take it into battle! Even though I’m a man, I’m so scared I can’t do shit!”

“Stop…please…I’m sorry, please don’t get mad…”

“And you’re gonna believe in me? Don’t say something like that when you don’t understand a thing. I’m going to end up dead, I’m going to die, that’s not the sort of person worth believing in!”

A-Bao ranted, like a child just trying to figure himself out. He was ashamed of what he was saying. But he couldn’t hold back. Just as Frau was compelled to sneak into his bed, A-Bao was also missing his emotional equilibrium.

Coming back from battle, waking up, being faced with reality. He was still slowly coming to grips with the horror of the battlefield.

‘This is really going to shake up this abnormal order.’ That was how he had boastfully raised his banner, ready to show everyone the dance that would bring destruction to the world, but it turned out the weight of it was terrifying, rendering him completely defenseless and overwhelmed by emotion. All of this over some trivial words.

Frau trembled. She hid her quivering lips with her hand.

A-Bao felt miserable. Disgusted with himself. The children were looking this way now. There was fear across their faces. He regretted what he had done. Before he realized it, tears were filling his eyes. Even he wasn't sure how to fix this. The tears weren't stopping. His emotions had reached a fever pitch, and the words weren't coming.

"…Don't put your trust in me…I…I'm so scared…what am I supposed to do…this is scary…it's so scary…"

Sirens echoed through the ship. They were going into battle again. A-Bao was still crying. He was still shaking. It was the first time he had ever told another person how he really felt.

I don't want to die.

It was a fragile, tiny voice.

Chapter Dossier:

-Mathilde Ajan

A French woman whose ancestors were Muslim. She reached out to the extremely distant *Pegasus* crew as they spend life adrift, all in the name of solidarity, and her existence has a profound effect on the crew. That includes her death as well… Her passing allows the crew to slowly begin to trust one another and leads to the deepening of their bonds.

The basic gist of the character's image wasn't much different from the original, so we reset our previous impressions of the character, went back to the original novel again and let our imagination be more involved in the rewrite. She's a "good woman," but in a different sense than Sayla. There are all sorts that can be said to be "good women."

By the way, "Matilda" is an older English spelling that often belongs to the more grandmotherly set, but "Mathilde" is a French spelling that gives it a more modern, youthful nuance. In this case her name is "Mathilde Ajan." Her appearance is still a ways off.

Chapter 11 “Gunboy Wilbur–A-Bao, Broken”

The story so far: A-Bao is a pilot candidate assigned to the battleship *Pegasus*, currently en route to a space colony to receive the new model of space combat weapon, the Machining Skin “Gunboy.” Thanks to an innate ability of premonition known as “Forecast,” he sees a vision of three Machining Skins, Blondies, of unknown affiliation attempting to steal the Gunboy, and so he goes ahead alone in order to board the Gunboy first and prevent the theft.

Attacks from the enemy ship have resulted in the breakdown of the *Pegasus’* chain of command and without so much as a helmsman, but thanks to the resolve of Mirai Eyland-Yashima their escape from the colony’s harbor is a success. After that, the *Pegasus* is attacked by an unrecognized enemy.

A-Bao is cowed by its presence on an intuitive level. Although saved by the *Pegasus* in the nick of time, he returns to the ship with the fear of death implanted within him. After regaining consciousness, he’s unable to hide his annoyance at the one-sided feelings of the girl who appears in front of him, his childhood friend Frau Bohr. As the War continues, death has become routine, as his lost memories mix together with images of the future A-Bao becomes ever more fearful of the battlefield.

It is here that the enemy alert sounds once again.

Hearing the sirens again, Fraw’s expression changed. It was a look of horror and shock, like being awoken by a stranger when you were supposed to have been sleeping alone.

Enemy units confirmed, all hands to your battle stations. Such was the announcement. As a part of the military A-Bao could at least understand why the alert they used wasn’t something anyone would find soothing, but right now that sound was excruciating.

The swell of tension that surged through the entire ship, as soon as the alarms sounded, had made its way to A-Bao and the others in the kitchen. It wouldn’t have been an exaggeration to say that the ship was already packed with raw human emotion.

Crew members calling for orders, shouting, civilian voices full of worry, prayer, cursing, children sobbing, the wounded crying out in pain. This was the reality of this warship, helmed by amateurs and full of noncombatants.

Unable to deal with any more intangible fears, Kikka and the others began to cry again, the trio running back to Fraw's side.

For a moment a look of disgust appeared on Fraw's face, and then it disappeared.

She could never love a child. But she didn't want A-Bao to know that, and she watched his face intently to make sure she hadn't been found out. Even she recognized how loathsome she was. The young, red-headed soldier in front of her hadn't looked away from the table. Touching his large forehead, he used the backside of his hand to hide his tear streaked eyes. There was a slight tremor in his body.

The previous battle, outer space—the enemy had appeared below him, a Blondie type Machining Skin. Whether its pilot had revealed their position to avoid being misidentified by their ally or to try to stay out of their way, indiscriminately broadcasting their powerful IFF laser signal in that situation was *suicide*.

On top of that, compared to the L-MESS, that mysterious rose pink machine darting across space at a speed so fast that he couldn't even keep track of it, the movements of the clumsy Blondie looked so sluggish that he almost wanted to yawn.

A-Bao's two shots had struck Blondie with such precision that they would have appeared to an observer as a single beam. To be clear, there was nothing easy about shooting down an enemy craft out in space. But to many who saw him, all A-Bao did was sortie, increase his kill count, and come home effortlessly.

Especially in the eyes of those with more skill and experience than the fresh-faced cadets. Watching A-Bao fight, they couldn't help but wonder if he was doing it with one hand behind his back.

It might have been overly optimistic to credit everything to the boy's latent potential, but the fact was that over the brief period of time from pilot training to his first battle inside a Machining Skin, not even ten combat missions, A-Bao had developed at a terrifyingly rapid pace. When the others looked at him, they were forced to confront the fact that there was something fundamentally different compared to themselves.

So, they explained away his existence by saying things like "he's missing his fear of death" or "he doesn't have any control over his bloodlust" or "that's just what the new generation is like."

That had been the reason his instructor, Lieutenant Ralv, spent so much time using A-Bao as a punching bag. Because of that "fundamental difference."

From the beginning A-Bao had never been very good at expressing himself, and when you added in his philosophical attitude regarding anything and everything the result was hardly endearing, but the fact was that the more ugly a new cadet was, the "cuter" the demonic instructor would find them.

However, Ralv definitely didn't count A-Bao as one of his favorite pupils. Even so, compared to the other pilot candidates who started at the same time as him, like Koo and Hayato, the number of instances A-Bao had been shown Ralv's "love" was of a completely different magnitude.

There was rarely a time when a large black and purple bruise wasn't present on A-Bao's forehead.

For Ralv, a genius level talent like A-Bao would have normally been another "cute" student that he could use to work through his inferiority complex over his

artificial hands, and maybe it was because using his prostheses had significantly sharpened his other senses, but there was something about A-Bao that terrified him.

He felt a monstrous power inside the boy, something that denied the very essence of Ralv's existence and wished to see him erased from this world. That was why he hit him, or slammed him into the exposed steel frame of the ship's walls, or kicked him with the toe of his boot. The scene of A-Bao being beaten by a man who looked like he had lost his mind, his face twisted by hatred and fear, even weeping occasionally, was something witnessed by the other pilot candidates again and again.

There were even times when the other cadets had to step in and pull Ralv away as he punched A-Bao, the words coming out of his mouth enough to make them truly question the man's sanity.

"Goddamnit, I'm begging you, don't erase me!"

Ralv feared A-Bao's "fundamental difference." He felt like he and his prosthetic hands were being weeded out. That's why he wanted A-Bao dead. To murder him. Unless he did that, he was sure that he was going to disappear.

He was about fifty percent right.

As it turned out, the boy would be responsible for Ralv's elimination in the future. But the "fundamental difference" he believed that the Streamer named A-Bao possessed didn't exist.

Be that as it may, it was unavoidable that he too would think that A-Bao was "piloting with one hand behind his back."

The reality was that neither sortie nor intercepting enemy craft came easy for A-Bao. The wear and tear and the mental repression that came with the extreme

stamina costs were steadily eating away at him with every mission. And then he would do it again, and each time he sortied and came back his emotions were further ground down, flatter and flatter, which only ended up increasing his despair and helplessness.

The problem was, he wasn't aware of any of that. Everything was happening outside of his conscious mind.

A-Bao had no memories of the past three years. That memory loss coincided with the awakening of the 8th Streamer ability, "Forecast." As a result, he began to refer to that event as "the cost of sight." In order to compensate for his missing past, he used the future and worked backwards. However, that wasn't the only "cost."

A-Bao had started to black out from time to time as well. To put it simply, following the daze of combat, when he would return and then collapse, unnoticed by anyone else, everything that had happened was filed away into the darkness.

None of these memories were stored as part of his normal consciousness, and he remained oblivious to the worry and fear that came with fighting. Even A-Bao himself believed that he was handling everything with ease.

That box had been opened.

An enormous trail of light from the exploding Blondie. The auto-filtration on the monitor kicks in. A burst of elation as the saucer-shaped fireball disappears. The excitement welling up inside him pushes his reflexes even higher.

As if in response, his partner Wilbur starts to move even quicker. There was no other feeling like it. There was nothing exciting about a cold machine. Better for it to feel like it could overheat at any time.

There was nothing else like running along that razor's edge. The intoxicated boy picked out the rapidly approaching "stingray" from Wilbur's monitor, which had already switched back to normal operation. Right now, I can do this! His delusions stretched that far. However, when A-Bao squeezed the trigger on the control stick between his legs, he was stunned.

Its energy output had increased. Even in space, with a pervasive fear crushing his entire body, he could still feel the blood draining from his face. Through the monitor, the L-MESS was right on top of him. In that moment he could see Death reaching for him. Several cannon blasts struck the L-MESS. The *Pegasus* had saved him.

It was then that A-Bao heard the voice, and he saw the world.

"You shall bring me a flower, as delicate as blown sugar. This is a place where a cool breeze blows. Time gently passes, punctuated by a few flashes of light. However, in contrast with this peaceful world, there is something hollow in your smile. The powerlessness I sense from it makes me so very, very sad. Freedom.

That is the word that floats up from inside of me. When I see the flower you showed me, it strikes me that you must be from a very restrictive place. It's as if something is holding you down. Disgusted with the facade that the world has become, you objectify your own destiny, in the belief that the only meaning for your existence is in your own death.

While you decide to entrust everything to the youths that will appear in the future, allow me to free you of your chains. I will offer up my feelings to you as you die, filled with regret. Touching your heart, I will attempt to liberate you.

But whether or not your restraints are a necessary curse or not, you will not give up on the final vesture you wear deep inside your heart, will you?

It is my hope that your heart would be freed in this world, so that you may live eternally. But instead your heart wished to return to a different world, one far, far away. That seems so sad to me. Farewell, red-haired person. Gently brushing against your lips, I will spread my wings wide. One day the inner light will surely guide you towards your freedom. At the moment you awaken, I shall be gone from within you."

It had been a woman's voice; beautiful. Not human, but something that sounded like it was being produced by a divine entity. A mysterious voice that he might have heard in his past, or maybe it was one from his future. A phantasmal world, where winged dragons soared through the sky. Was that a prediction of the future, or the manifestation of an entirely different ability altogether?

A-Bao didn't have the answer. But that fantasy land had been triggered by the outrageous terror brought on by the L-MESS, so great that even his "darkness" wasn't enough to contain it. Without a doubt, the lid to the box that contained all of his fears, the place that he escaped to when pushed to his limits, had been removed.

The hardships of the battlefield came shooting up out of the darkness. His entire body was seized with the urge to run away. This was the first time he had ever experienced anything like it.

Another alert echoed through the ship. They were using the internal line to search for A-Bao.

"A-Bao. A-Bao, listen!" Frau didn't know if he was shaking because he was crying or because he was afraid. The girl, unable to look out for anyone but herself, had no idea what he was feeling. "Hey, A-Bao!" She only wanted

A-Bao to protect her. For A-Bao, who felt no love or anything else towards her, it was an extremely selfish request.

A-Bao headed for his suit chamber, still discouraged. There was only one place that he'd be able to escape from Fraw.

The catapult fired, launching the iron coffin named Gunboy Wilbur.

However, A-Bao's Wilbur would not make it back to the *Pegasus*.

It was the year 0080 of the Universal Century, and the real war was yet to begin.

Intermission – A Compilation

“The light, and the breath of a new era. For the Barrel begins…” It has been one year since that declaration was made in the shocking prologue, to mixed reactions. Through the act of creating a “cover,” For The Barrel takes its shape, and we reflect on the backdrop of the story to come.

The young man Ling A-Bao fights against a destiny that he does not know is immutable. Most laugh at his efforts. But A-Bao fights. There is no way he could ever stop struggling against the people that created him and the fate arranged for him.

Even if he has to do it all alone; even if the only thing that waits at the end for him is death… When a person dies, they return to ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void.

Everyone will forget that he even existed, and everything will sink into the pit of memories. As if nothing was there to begin with.

Lom Flanagan's Grave Sin—The Eve of A-Bao

When a person dies, they return to the ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void— The background story has started to come to light…The second installment of the compilation for the reimagined novel that's caught everyone's attention!

When it came to the destiny of the boy named A-Bao, everything had been arranged in advance. His dreams, the actions he would take, even his own death were all things that had been preprogrammed. However, if you subscribed to the idea that everyone's life is determined by their genes, this didn't just apply to A-Bao, but to all of humanity equally. What made things different in this case was that A-Bao's fate, all the way up to the moment of his death, had been tampered with by someone else.

♦

On a rainy night, an athletically built gentleman appeared in front of Professor Lom Flanagan, a researcher of bioinformatics. "Burn this right now, where I can see," the man said as he produced a piece of paper with his name written on it, and an offer of financial support below. By this period in time paper was already a luxury item, and it wasn't easy to get your hands on unless you were part of the bourgeoisie. Just as the freedom to remain living on Earth was a sign of great wealth, the same was true with paper, a resource found nowhere else.

Flanagan immediately understood that he wasn't dealing with a normal person. And when he realized from the green pin on the man's lapel that his visitor was connected with the enormous Packdelia Foundation, one of the top financial consortiums on Earth, he became worried, and his defenses went up.

Noting Flanagan's reaction, the man, dressed in refined clothing, showed a smile that extended no deeper than his lips, and speaking in a soft manner he began to lay out the terms of his offer. A lab for Flanagan to do his research, unlimited funding and more. In his current situation it was beyond the professor's wildest dreams, but he stubbornly continued to refuse. However, all of that was easily overcome with just a few more words from the man.

"For our dearly departed founder, and by extension, all of us at the Packdelia Foundation, the existence of 'that woman' is a very special one. The same holds true for her kin. Do you follow me?"

The negotiations only took a couple of minutes. The man intimated that he would be moving out to Flanagan's colony.

The research that the Foundation requested was proof of what the philosopher Zeon Deikun had propagated as the future human theory of "Streamers," the claim that the Space Age would bring about the growth of an enhanced type of the species, and a claim that a small percentage of people had quietly started to latch on to. In addition to his own laboratory, they also provided Flanagan with a single youth. That was A-Bao. The red haired boy's eyes were lifeless, possibly a result of his drugged consciousness. His pale, emaciated arms were scarred with painful looking injection marks.

"Born in a forgettable part of Taiwan, we took him in when the innate abilities of precognition he possessed led to him being treated as a lunatic. His family was scattered, and his personal details, even his own memories, were erased. We completed the initial experiments ourselves using the Foundation's facilities on Earth. What we would ask from you is five years of research. After that he will have both his memories and his abilities artificially sealed off through the process of prenatal recursion and be taken back to the Earth, where he will have the bare necessity of memories implanted to allow him to live as a normal boy. On his 14th birthday he will be brought back to space and you will be reunited. Even if we seal his abilities, it's not likely to be completely successful, given the

astounding numbers he shows. This is the important part. In other words, we want him to experience a sense of alienation and isolation, and persecution as well, to a lesser degree. That way, when he meets you again, your performative affirmations will lead him to believe that, ‘in space, it’s not only people’s bodies, but their hearts that become lighter as well.'”

The second time Flanagan met the boy, there was even a script ready for him.

Despite possessing an inborn gift, A-Bao’s powers were unstable, with a tendency to weaken for periods of time. The Packdelia Foundation reinforced his abilities through Flanagan’s laboratory, but in the course of doing so most of the boy’s memories were wiped and reconstructed.

Over half of the things A-Bao knows are falsified. His ability, “Forecast,” is nothing more than an image of the future created by human hands and implanted inside him.

The same is true when it comes to the vision of his death; Leroy is just a program that has been prepared in order to execute that operation.

The Hidden Desires of the Mysterious Man, Packdelia the VII

“Right now, Earth may lack the tools necessary to understand you, but space will gladly accept you. Won’t you help show a hopeless old man the dawn of a new era?”

Looking over his lines, Flanagan felt irritated that he had already been written into this story, but he wasn’t in a position to refuse. Plus, he was enjoying the best life had to offer, with the freedom to pick any of the finely featured women he wanted and a diet of all natural food, none of that synthetic stuff. He wasn’t about to give that up either.

♦

Rewind time, back to before Flanagan first met A-Bao.

Out in space, the Anti-Earth movement had started to gain steam, led by a select group of immigrants. The poor working conditions for the people building the colonies served to both stoke resentment against the Earth while strengthening the sense of unity among those living in space. Nowhere was this felt as strongly as Side 3, the oldest of the sides used for immigration purposes. It was nearly fifty years after moving to Side 3 that the Anti-Earth Union Group, who had adopted Zeon Deikun’s Future Human Theory as their ideology and advocated for independence and self-reliance in addition to carrying out small scale resistance activities, would be approached by the non-Federation members of the Earth Assembly with the offer of military support.

A student whose ESP abilities awakened as he was wandering through space, Packdelia VII would encounter a certain man.

In his youth, Packdelia III, founder of the group that would bear his name, met a woman in Lumbini, Nepal, near to the border of India. The unique experience, after which he was able to divine the location of oil, instilled within him a lifelong obsession with extraordinary abilities. After becoming "The Last Oil Baron on Earth" and establishing his foundation, he assembled a team of researchers in secret, and even after death his son carried on with his wishes, continuing the ESP research himself. When it came to the discovery and seizure of Ling A-Bao, the boy with such high ability values, or the awakening of Packdelia VII's own powers, none of it was a coincidence. All of these things came about artificially as a result of the ESP research institute's work in the background.

The man Packdelia VII would meet while traveling through space was named Challia Bull, connected to the Anti-Earth Union Group. One glance at the taciturn dandy was all it took for Packdelia VII to sense his power, and he would initiate contact with the AEUG soon after that. It seemed particularly significant that trace levels of ESP were detected in many of the AEUG members. When he found himself inheriting control of the foundation due to the unexpected death of his predecessor Packdelia VI, he immediately ordered non-Federation countries to provide resources for military cooperation with the resistance group, and the increased funding allowed the AEUG to increase both the scale and frequency of their activities. Finally, with the success of the "Bloodless Revolution" within Side 3's Autonomous Republic of Munzo, the AEUG proved that they were serious.

As these events took place, Packdelia VII was looking for a way to reinforce the guiding philosophy of the Anti-Earth Union Group's adherents. In other words, he wanted a concrete example of the Streamer theory, even if that example had to be forced somewhat in order to fit. So he suggested to promising research groups that they move out to the colonies to work on producing research that proved Spacenoid supremacy, promising large amounts of funding up front.

Out of these, the researcher whose paper "On Measuring the Expansion of Mental Limits According to Environment" hypothesized that "life in space will instigate further development in human perception, and it is possible to measure proof of that change through mechanical means," and who provided such specific numbers that it seemed like he had already found his sample, was highly regarded by the foundation, questions about his reliability aside. That was Flanagan.

After looking into the background of the paper's author, the people of the Packdelia Foundation would discover something unexpected. Flanagan had, in fact, had a sample, and it was a child that had been produced by the union of none other than Zeon Deikun and the woman that Packdelia III once met in Nepal. The child's name was Lalah Sung.

To Flanagan she had been both a suitable subject and the ultimate toy. However, one day, Lalah would suddenly depart from this world. With that much known about him, there was no way that Flanagan could refuse their offer.

The subjects of his research were A-Bao, Challia, and two other members of the AEUG that displayed high ESP values. As the first ones chosen for study, they would collectively be referred to as the "Original Four."

Several years went by. Although the existence of the Flanagan Institute and research into Streamer development served as useful propaganda for the Anti-Earth Union Group, the truth was that Flanagan actually had started to produce steady results affirming the superiority of those living in space and the awakening of their "unique powers." Of his research, it was the replacement of the vague use of "Streamers" with "The Nine," a set of specifically defined abilities that would only manifest through life in space, that earned him the Munzo Medal of Academic Merit.

Flanagan was at the height of his glory. He didn't care if it came as the result of his research being hyperbolized. As long as he could use his riches to achieve

his one desire… The resurrection of Lalah Sung. Flanagan intended to meddle in a world forbidden to the living.

The Encounter with the Girl—And the Birth of the Young King

There was a boy squatting in the darkness, his knees pulled up into his chest. He chews on his fingernails. His eyes are keen, and you can tell that there is a strong determination in them.

The boy thinks.

When a person dies, they return to ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void. The darkness is erased by light, but so is the light erased by darkness. That definitely isn't something caused by hopelessness. That's why I want to stay strong.

That's what he thought.

Of all the myriad types of people, when it came to the predetermined program known as "Death," they didn't fight against it, but lived with it. That was the sole startup item installed in everyone. The powerful determination in the boy's eyes was a reflection of this. And yet, the reason he was in the dark, clutching his knees, was because there was something in conflict with that determination. The contradiction between hesitation and determination—it was all because the red-haired boy named Ling A-Bao was still just a boy.

When a person dies, they return to ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void. The darkness is erased by light, but so is the light erased by darkness.

All human beings are shaped through information that's been created by someone else. From the physical body, to knowledge, to values, to actions, none

of your principles are your own. However, if nothing else, he wanted to believe that he had come up with those words all by himself.

But even they had been borrowed.

♦

It was before the era of space immigration had begun. Lumbini, Nepal, near the border of India. A young man appears, traveling on his own. His face is dirty, and his body emaciated. With an odd expression, he looks to the heavens. His name is Packdelia III. Later in life, he will become the founder of the Packdelia Foundation. He was poor, but holding tight to the small sum of money he had managed to save up through hard work, he makes this aimless journey. This would have been permitted back then, in the time before space immigration—when even those without any money could remain on the Earth. This journey to broaden his horizons had been an unexpectedly harsh one. Even finding water had been a hardship.

But despite everything, he was enjoying his travels.

The person he would meet on this journey would change both his own destiny and that of the Packdelia bloodline, providing the wealth that would be required to keep living on the Earth in the coming space age. However, he was still unaware of any of that. He stood alone as he looked to the night sky, unaware of anything. He loved to gaze up at the stars. And then, Packdelia saw the light, and the human silhouette beyond it. Fine, smooth black skin—a beautiful naked body. It was a holy image, he thought. However, it vanished into the darkness the moment he became aware of its presence.

“An illusion…”

The plants were sleeping, bathed by the gentle wind. The light from above fell onto the silent earth. Sitting atop a boulder that had lived through countless lifetimes, he muttered to himself.

“No…it wasn’t just an illusion…if it was, then why can’t I see anything?” There was no longer any light in his eyes. He didn’t know why he had suddenly lost his eyesight, but with the change came a second strange occurrence inside him, one that prevented him from panicking further. “Even though my eyes might not see…I can clearly understand my surroundings… The dryness of the soil, the plants swaying in the breeze, dusted with dewdrops… How can this be? I’m seeing more of the world now than I ever saw before… And then, and then…who are you?”

That smooth, dark skin was there. The nude body, legs elegantly outstretched, sat beside the young man, smiling. It was a beautiful, black-haired girl.

“…When…”

It was a crystalline voice, one that felt like it would swallow him up.

“When a person dies, they return to ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void. The darkness is erased by light, but so is the light erased by darkness. The joy of birth slips into the sorrow of death, and then the sorrow of death becomes the joy of birth once again. What could it be that the soul sees as it travels over and over through the circle of reincarnation?”

“The soul sees time, it sees history. But I’ve heard that the reason a soul cannot bring happiness is because it’s trapped within the prison called a body.”

“You wished to be freed from your body…that was what I felt from you, so I granted your wish. Using the light you just saw.”

The “Leap Light.” That was what she called that bounding light.

“What you freed with the light, were these eyes?”

“Those are the ones you originally possessed. Humans see the world through the reflection of light. However, your eyes are able to see everything without being subjected to light. Joy, sorrow, virtue, malice, everything…”

“Strange, all of this is so strange. But nothing is stranger than you. I’ve never seen anyone as beautiful. It’s as if I’m seeing the divinity of the very soul itself. Who are you?”

“I have no other power but this. That is why this is the limit of what I can do to free your soul from its body. However…there is another power that women have. A different power to release men’s souls from their bodies, possessed by all who are born as women…” She entwines her body around the young man. “A woman’s life is complete once she gives birth. That is the fate of my lineage… Perhaps you might be the one to kill me…”

His sense of self disappears into her limpid voice. His thoughts foggy, he finds himself bewitched listening to her words, drunk with ecstasy. And then, his soul was freed.

When he awoke, the girl was gone. A vision? A dream? There was no need to doubt. The lingering feeling in his body, and most of all, the enormity of this world, so different from the one he had seen up until yesterday, told him everything he needed to know. His horizons had been expanded in the greatest sense of the word, and with it came the sign that the young man’s roaming was nearing its end.

Afterwards, the young man who had gained eyes that could see everything would find deposits of oil deep underground, becoming known as “The Last Oil Baron on Earth,” and attaining endless riches and status. But even with his eyes freed from his physical body, the one thing he was unable to find was the woman he had met in Lumbini. And then, his life would end without ever

learning who she was. He lived to the age of 66. He would never meet her again, but the foundation he established would keep his wish alive. However, none of his sons displayed the special power he possessed. It would be four generations until it appeared in the family again…

♦

Decades have passed since the death of Packdelia III. The story advances into the space age.

The long awaited day had finally come for Professor Flanagan. He headed for the laboratory beneath his private residence. Flanagan was at the height of his glory. His thesis, based on redefining the philosopher Zeon Deikun's "Future Human Theory of Streamers" with more realistic abilities, had won the Munzo Medal of Academic Merit. He didn't care if the results had been inflated just to satisfy his sponsor, the Packdelia Foundation. His thoughts were on Lalah Sung.

"A woman's life is complete once she gives birth. That is the fate of my lineage…"

Of course, the same fate had been inherited by Lalah as well, and at age 14 she gave birth, and died. It all happened in less than seven months, during the time that Flanagan had left her side to immerse himself in his research. It broke him. He swore that he would find the man responsible and kill him. And that eventually, one day, he would revive her himself.

The raising of the dead, by human hands. No matter the era, it would always be an act of trespass into a forbidden world, but Flanagan was resolute. Common sense was a trivial thing in the face of love and an excessive desire for knowledge.

And now, the time has come.

His efforts appeared to have paid off. However, the resurrected girl had truly become the embodiment of evil.

♦

The first meeting between Flanagan and Lalah was not a coincidence. Lalah was the offspring of Zeon Deikun and the mysterious woman Packdelia III once met. Zeon would find her decades after Packdelia III's encounter, and together they would conceive a child. As he already had a wife and two children at that time, she remained in her hometown in Lumbini for the birth. However, just as she had said herself, she would give up her own life in exchange for bringing her child into the world. No one from her family was upset by this, or tried to prevent it from happening. They simply bore witness to her destiny in silence.

After her death, the first tragedy occurred on a rainy night, just as the moon slipped behind the clouds. Lalah, the daughter she had exchanged her own life for, disappeared without warning.

This was the tale of a woman's revenge. Her name was Crowley Hamon, and she was the lover of Ramba, son of Zeon's former confidant Jimba Ral. The actual reason Zeon had abandoned the Ral family, who had continued to support him from the time of Jimba's generation, was never made clear. Afterwards, rumors of unspeakable misdeeds swirled around the household, and it was only a matter of time before the family collapsed. Ramba committed suicide. Hamon despised Zeon, who had betrayed her beloved and driven him into a corner. And then, she would never forget what he told her on the night of Ramba's private funeral service.

"A woman shouldn't have to sleep alone."

Upon hearing those words, she vowed that she would have her revenge. So she became Zeon's mistress in order to get closer to him…

It was no mistake that Hamon knew about Zeon's secret child Lalah. She was informed of Lalah's existence by the Bull family, with whom she had a secret arrangement. The Bulls operated in darkness, and it was said that their actions were ever present behind the curtain of recorded history, never to be seen out in the open. Their true nature was cloaked in mystery, and they sent their "familiars," all of which shared the same appearance, to interact with the outside world. These negotiators of death all hid their faces behind a mask. It was unknown how many of them there were, but they all went by the same name:

Char Azna Bull.

It wasn't clear what Hamon was planning to do now that she knew about Lalah. There was an animosity there that only a woman whose love had been killed could understand. She believed that with Lalah she could destroy everything Zeon had—his wife, his children, his social standing, everything.

When she asked the familiar to kidnap Lalah, he required an absolute contract, separate from the already colossal payment. It would sign over the contractor's body and soul to the Bull family, as well as everything related to their past, present and future.

"People wonder why we all look alike. All of us are copies of the physical body provided by a certain absolute contractor."

The familiar told her that everything would be accomplished within the next ninety-six hours.

Even during Zeon's one-sided love making, Hamon's hatred of him didn't waver. Perhaps he could sense that. Leaning closer, he whispered the reason he had driven Ramba away into her ear.

“Your man did something I could never forgive. I don’t like remembering this, but I’ll tell you anyway. That man assaulted my daughter. Make sure you’re listening carefully. He was a bastard who defiled a 10-year-old girl.”

Hamon had never considered that Ramba’s perversions could have been the cause of all of this. If Zeon’s words were true, what was the point of her promise? She didn’t want to admit that the flames of revenge which had kept her going this far were weakening.

If she did, it still wouldn’t mean that everything was over. It had already been eighty-four hours and twenty minutes since she had signed the absolute contract. There hadn’t been any word from the familiar yet. Hamon was about to arrive at a singular conclusion.

The Awakening of Lalah Sung and the Birth of the Originator of “Humachining”

Night.

Three creatures galloped beneath the starry sky. Lumbini, Nepal. Once upon a time, this place had been the birthplace of the Buddha.

The racing beasts—familiars contracted by Crowley Hamon, all sharing the name “Char Azna Bull,” headed for the remote corner of the world near India, where they had been tasked with capturing Lalah Sung. Bodies soaring through the air, their inhuman jumping ability and leg strength propelled them towards their destination before the dust had a chance to settle. They had been running for thirty minutes since leaving their trailer, but they weren’t at all short of breath.

The wind abruptly stopped blowing. They were almost to their target. The entrance to a small village. It blended together with the earth, as if it had stood there for many generations prior.

A solitary figure appeared. The long shadow stood in the way of the familiars.

“No matter how many times I see them, I’ll never get used to what strange bodies you modified humans have. Every part of you is so mismatched with the rest that it’s like looking at a badly made doll. With more and more of you popping up these days, I’ll need to be thinking about my business.”

He was an old man, thin and balding. Barefoot. He had the look of someone from a bygone age. The familiars flashed a dull red light from the unusual masks they wore—each housing a single eye. However, the old man didn’t flinch. He didn’t show any signs of agitation, he just continued to stand there. It

was as if heaven itself was serenely observing the passing of time. The earth that sustained everything. The swaying grass, the parched soil, the splash of water. There was a sense of familiarity from the figure, someone who accepted all and became all.

“You know chi? The flow of life through the body. I can manipulate its direction, explode it outwards, disrupt my opponent’s connection, that is, stop it at the meridians. But you lot, you don’t even have meridians. So an old fool like me really doesn’t have any great ideas. Not easy ones, at least.”

The man sniffed. He could feel a dampness in his nostrils. It will be raining here very soon.

“Well, let’s get this over with. This kind of thing is hard once you get to my age.”

Three flashing eyes in the dark of night. The shadow of the old man. And watching the proceedings from a distance, a woman by the name of Dr. Sophia. The old man lifted his lanky hand and took a shallow breath, cycling the chi within his body, and then he forcefully expelled the air inside his lungs. His posture snapped upright. Sophia gasped.

“Amazing…even though just a moment ago his presence felt no different from the grass growing around him.” It looked to her like the small old man’s bony frame had grown by at least one or two sizes.

“When a person dies, they return to the ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void. That’s why we live. If you’re going to take the shape of a person, playing like you’re human, then you better do it seriously. But if you never had any chi from the very beginning then it’s already over, you damn puppets.”

He holds up a loosely clenched fist. Watching him, Sophia felt her sense of curiosity tingling. The moon illuminates the night. The old man, who is clearly not going to step aside, relaxes for just a moment.

“If you aren’t going to take the first move, then I will, alright?”

The rock beneath his feet splinters. The old man’s shout charges to the heavens. As if reacting to the indescribable voice, a baby cries from deeper within the village. The clouds begin to conceal the moon.

The beautiful night sky quickly starts to crumble, as if the whole scene had been a lie.

♦

Zeon Deikun had entrusted care of Lalah Sung, his illegitimate child as well as his Achilles heel, to Doctor Sophia, an obedient subordinate. This was not only for security reasons, but because it was important that the special abilities that Lalah and her lineage possessed be studied.

Doctor Sophia had gone to Lalah’s location along with several other assistants, plus a Taiwanese man sent directly by Zeon himself. That was Xún. Not even Sophia knew the details of Zeon and Xún’s relationship, but she understood from the way that Zeon behaved towards him that Xún’s standing was unusual.

Then there was the development she had just observed. The fight between Xún and the Char Azna Bulls had reached an unexpected conclusion. Resonating with Xún’s chi as he released an overwhelming amount of power, the crying baby Lalah had awoken to her latent powers.

The space around them twisted, and the Chars trapped inside it were crushed into oblivion. It only took a few seconds. Sofia was protected by the distortion only because Xún expended every bit of strength he had to keep them safe.

Lalah vanished.

By warping space, Lalah had transported her physical body. The place she arrived was inside the chest of the humachining robot.

The Humachining Project took place under the watch of the Earth Federation, using the human form as its ultimate technical objective and assembling the best that bioengineering (bionics) and mechanical engineering had to offer.

The design philosophy behind humachining was driven entirely by bioinformatics, featuring concepts like using electrically amplified human thought as a control scheme or amplified bioenergy as a power source.

A young Dr. Flanagan was part of the project's development, and he had run into a roadblock. He wasn't detecting the kind of power that he believed should have been present as a result of amplified bioenergy.

"I suppose it really does require a massive amount of potent bioenergy to act as a trigger."

One night, Flanagan found himself going alone to the hangar where the Humachining Project slept. It was something like intuition. And he was right. Lying there, the robot was eagerly anticipating the moment of its awakening, filled with all the bioenergy necessary to operate.

Amidst Various Destinies and Grudges, the Birth of Ling A-Bao and the Quickening of a New Era

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It was an impossibility. Flanagan fearfully approached the experimental bioenergy collection box mounted across its chest—the capsule containing a human being inside it—and opened the hatch. It was a beautiful sight. At the same time, it was a preposterous one. A brown-skinned infant was sleeping peacefully inside, sucking on its finger. And it grew up quickly. In the span of almost no time at all. The baby metamorphosed into a perfect little girl and opened her eyes. That was how Flanagan met Lalah Sung, and the start of the road towards catastrophe.

With Lalah's powerful bioenergy, the Humachining Project moved into the final testing stages, and it was only a short time until it would be completed. However, humachining would never see use in any practical applications. In the end, there were a lot of reasons that led to the cancellation of the project, including the requirement of a special pilot, the touchy nature of the machine and the concern that the philosophy behind humachining itself was dangerous.

That latter point came mostly from within the Earth Federation, which viewed the rising influence of Zeon Deikun's "Streamers" theory in recent years as a threat.

Flanagan, who had already had the humachining robot "Gump" taken from him, couldn't bear the thought of losing Lalah as well, and he plotted their escape from the Federation's control.

It was at that time that Lalah, age 14, became pregnant, and true to her family's destiny she died after childbirth. Everything happened in Flanagan's absence. He had received a certain research request, although he hesitated upon learning that one of the terms of the job was a year-long commitment. Because Lalah

was with him. However, over this half year, she hadn't awoken even once from her deep slumber. At the same time, the payment for this job was too tempting to ignore.

Locking the sleeping Lalah within her biocapsule, located in the cell underneath his home, Flanagan set off for his research destination. Unbeknownst to Flanagan, the son of Zeon was working behind the scenes of this request.

Casval Deikun was the father of Lalah's child.

♦

For the Bulls, the family operating in darkness behind the curtain of written history, the failure to capture Lalah was a grievous error that not even the passage of time could forgive.

The client, Crowley Hamon, had already fallen into Zeon's hands, her mind shattered by drugs and her body reduced to a plaything in some dungeon, but that was a different matter. The failure created resentment within the Bull family, and the brunt of it was directed at Zeon, the one who had prevented Lalah's abduction.

The two men were in the Taiwanese countryside.

"Who'd have ever thought I'd have a son at my age. Unlike you, I still have much to learn."

On a small riverboat, the old man drank his wine. He didn't seem discontent. It was Xún. After providing the catalyst for Lalah's awakening and protecting Sophia, he had covered his tracks and disappeared.

"I'm no match for you, Master."

A gentleman sat across from him. His suit seemed at odds with the half-naked Xún, but neither of them seemed to care.

“What did you name him?”

“Hm. What name would you choose?”

“If it were me…Ling.”

“Ling. That’s a nice name. Alright, let’s go with Ling.”

“Master, is that really okay?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. It’s more modern than what I would come up with.” He looked quite pleased. “Now then.” Xún set down the bowl he had been drinking from. “Yashima.”

“What is it, Master?”

“Will you look after my son?”

The man named Yashima did not ask for a reason. Asking wouldn’t have changed his response.

“Yes.” That was it.

“You’ve become a fine man, Yashima.” Xún raised his head. The skies were clear. “Well, I’ll leave things to you.”

“What about you, Master?” That question was all Yashima could manage.

“I might be away a little longer this time. Just some old business that needs taking care of.”

Gazing down at the face of his sleeping son beside him, the old man’s expression looked incredibly sad. That was more than enough to tell that this was goodbye.

“Forgive me for burdening you with such a painful fate. Please try to stay alive. I’ll be going on ahead, as your father.” Saying that, Xún closed his eyes. Yashima could only weep, unable to speak.

On that day Zeon Deikun, prophet of humanity’s future, was assassinated by the Bull family.

♦

While various destinies and grudges mingled together, the world was undergoing a major shift. As mankind seized control of the universe, the era that viewed expansion into space as the symbol of a bright future was already fading into the past. With that said, space travel was only something to be enjoyed by the wealthy, and space during this time was nothing more than an upscale theme park where the rich could spend enormous amounts of money and bask in the feeling of superiority. In other words, the symbol of the future was turning into the symbol of wealth. However, as expansion continued and forced migration began, to a place without air or water, space lost its association with luxury.

“The people staying behind on Earth are the politicians and the ones funding their lifestyles.”

The first generation migrants would point to the irony of switching positions with the rich. The Earth had become a haven for the aristocracy. And in contrast, outer space, still under development, was harsh. The difficulty of life in space far exceeded the expectations of those forced to move there. It’s not a place

meant for people to live—the number of people proclaiming that were decreasing as well. In addition to the hard labor associated with colony development, the inconveniences of day to day life and the lack of personal freedom were clearly taking a mental and physical toll.

However, those living on Earth looked down on the space colonies as places of filthy air and water. It wasn't long before anti-Earth sentiment had started to take root in the immigrant population.

And then—

A single warship makes its appearance. The space battleship *Pegasus* heads to the colonies in order to take possession of the Gunboy series, next generation space combat craft known as machining skins. Onboard the *Pegasus,* as people and history toy with his future, the young pilot candidate Ling A-Bao sits alone, listening to the stirring of the times.

1984, NO FUTURE

OVERTURE

I begged for a bicycle, even though my feet couldn't reach the pedals yet. I wanted a space of my own, where no one else could interfere. I wanted to make it by myself, as quickly as possible. I wanted to live while staying true to nothing but my own instincts. However, I realized it when I received one. Those dreams are never a match for reality.

A few days ago, a big hole opened up in a colony somewhere. I don't know how many people died, but it's no big deal, right? They're always talking about the overpopulation problem anyway. At any rate, it sounds like the damage is too great to be repaired (probably). That was the day I got fired.

Well, it's not an uncommon story.

In the Present, Casval stood before a tall thin boy with wild red hair. They were strangers to each other, in a strange land for both of them.

“Please ! Please, take me into battle with you! I'll make a good soldier!”

“A soldier? You'd be better off quitting now”

“If this is just to fulfill your own desires, Isn't that right?” Casval pleaded with the Boy, he’d seen him enter the Texas Zone in a beautiful white iron stead and wanted more than nothing else to escape the hell of his desolate, temporary, home.

“Forecast...“ The boy entered a brief trance almost looking through Casval, taking in his *mind*. His eyes met Casval’s, allowing the boy to gleam him.

A brilliant person whose sensitivity could save the world. A strong life was born in order to protect the weak....That's what I want to believe. Casval's thoughts were clear to A-Bao. His desires were clear to him: *conflict.*

"Even so, you'd still want to know the future!? Casval Bailey!" He was shocked, who was this guy? How does he know my name? Did he rehearse this? HOW?

"I'll show you what it is that you want! If you want to see the future that badly, then follow me. The future! All of it! I'll show you *what it is* that you want! A person's *destiny*! The meaning of *power*! The reason *for the fire*! The in-discriminate *destruction*! The *hell* of battle!"

He made a dramatic pause before letting out the thunderous crescendo of his declaration.

"And my own *death*!"

♦

No matter where, no matter when. It seemed that my foolish words had been deeply disrespectful of the shepherd's feelings. Since he was such a compassionate person, I thought, "Can't you spare some of that compassion for me?" But he really did seem like he would have punched me if I told him that, so I didn't. In this era, it seems like all people do is abandon their old gods. There aren't any stories of someone meeting a new one

However, I hear that a country exists on the periphery of Earth that's home to more than 33 million gods. Among them is a god that destroys things. It's a very popular story with the commonfolk. The god destroying things, that is.

"This might not be so bad" That thought was the beginning of his mistakes.

tribal arrival

THE STORY SO FAR:

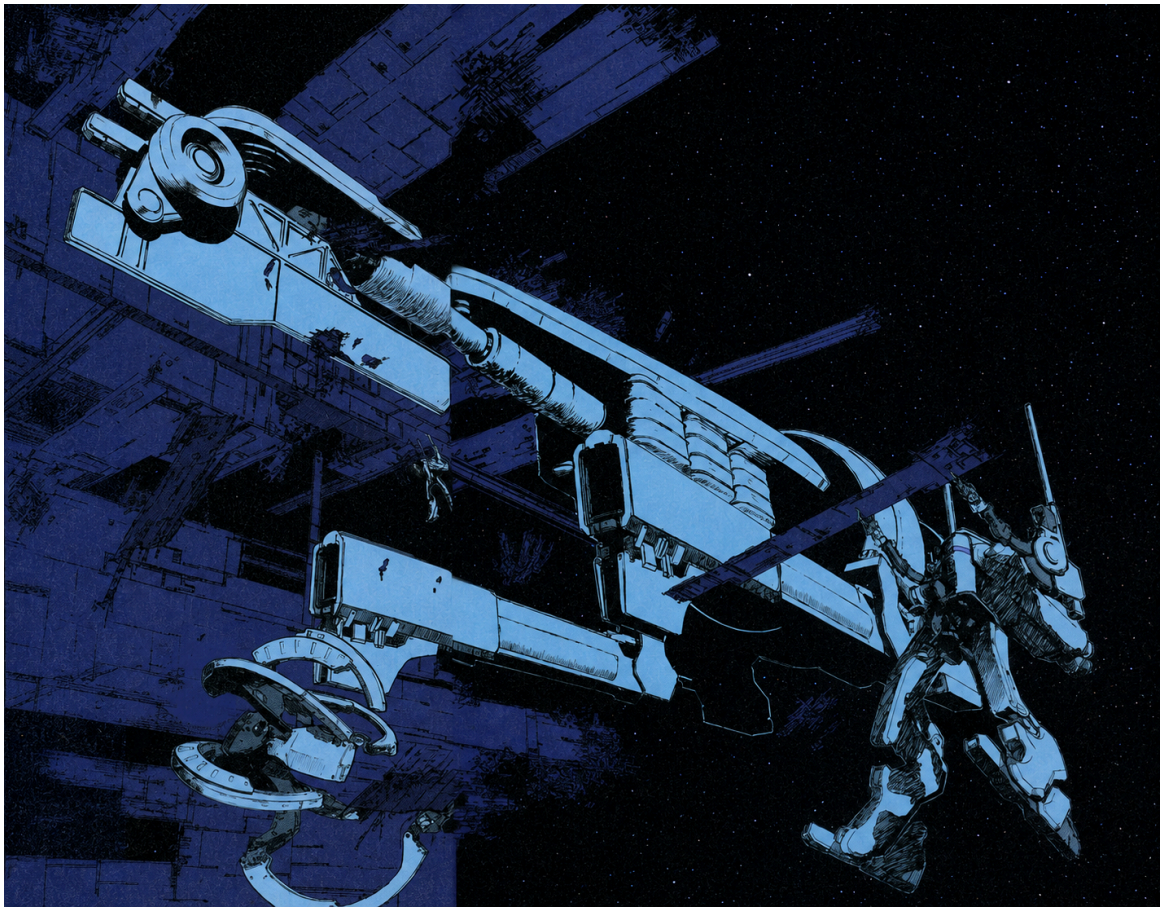
Pegasus had arrived, after a long and arduous journey from the colony *Noah* to the Shoal Zone of Texas Zone. Stalked tirelessly by the AEUG in a cat-and-mouse game against the *Zanzibar* where war has taken its toll on both crews. Yet *Pegasus* isn't fleeing—it is hunting. It plays a game of death with the L-MESS, the Flagship *Hull* nearby delivering orders to the captain that he dispenses at personal discretion.

Reflecting on the lives lost, including the heartfelt loss of Ms. Ajan and her Supply Fleet, *Pegasus* has been forced into a desperate situation due to the loss of its Water Processor. Docked within the heavily obstructed zone, a pair would search the colony and the crew hid the ship in the shoal; large and small space dust scattered in the Texas Zone created difficulty for electronic detection. Especially when **Minovsky particles** were dispersed in such a shoal zone, detection becomes utterly impossible.

This decision necessitated completely visual navigation of the zone by the *Zanzibar's* complement, inherently fraught with danger. However, the risk of being detected by the enemy in concealed operations outweighs other dangers, justifying the utmost caution. Ironically this decision has created a lull for downtime, and with Wilbur currently in the colony, the crew is every bit more uneasy.

The crew of the Pegasus stands at the cusp, their peace sitting on a knife's edge

Bee-eep “This is the *Pegasus*. How do things feel?” Marker chimed in on the *Pegasus’* escorts clearing debris in their path.



“C109, Koo. Not bad. Not good either. Since you're already hooked up to my machine just go ahead and take the latest data yourself.” Koo was still on edge, disturbed by the journey from *Noah* and Barrel 7.

“Copy that.” responded Oscar

Bee-eee-eee-eep.

“This is Hayato in C108!“ his voice boomed over the bridge. Full of distress. “What's wrong?” quipped Marker.

“What is A-Bao doing??? Don't let him slack off!”

“He and Ms. Mechanic have a date right now…According to the database, it looks like the Texas Zone has a water purification system that could work as a replacement for ours, so they're sneaking inside” Marker established then and there, they were on a given assignment.

“Don't you think you're relying on him *too* much?” Koo’s annoyance was clear but Marker deftly rejected his suggestion “What's that supposed to mean?!” Koo responded “He's still human, same as the rest of us. No matter what you might say about him…”

Marker couldn’t believe his ears staring with incredulity at Koo through the Orville’s communicator window, yet Koo relented.

“After doing all that, I'm sure he's going to want to take a bit of a break. With that said... Once the fighting starts, I don't think we're gonna be able to hold things down by ourselves...”

♦

“I can't believe him!!! Leaving a girl all by herself inside an abandoned colony dock and then going off who knows where! That dumbass!!!” *Clang* *Clang* Shima Hachijo banged on a workbench desk, she was enraged over being left behind by A-Bao in Texas Zone’s Dock for reasons he refused to share.

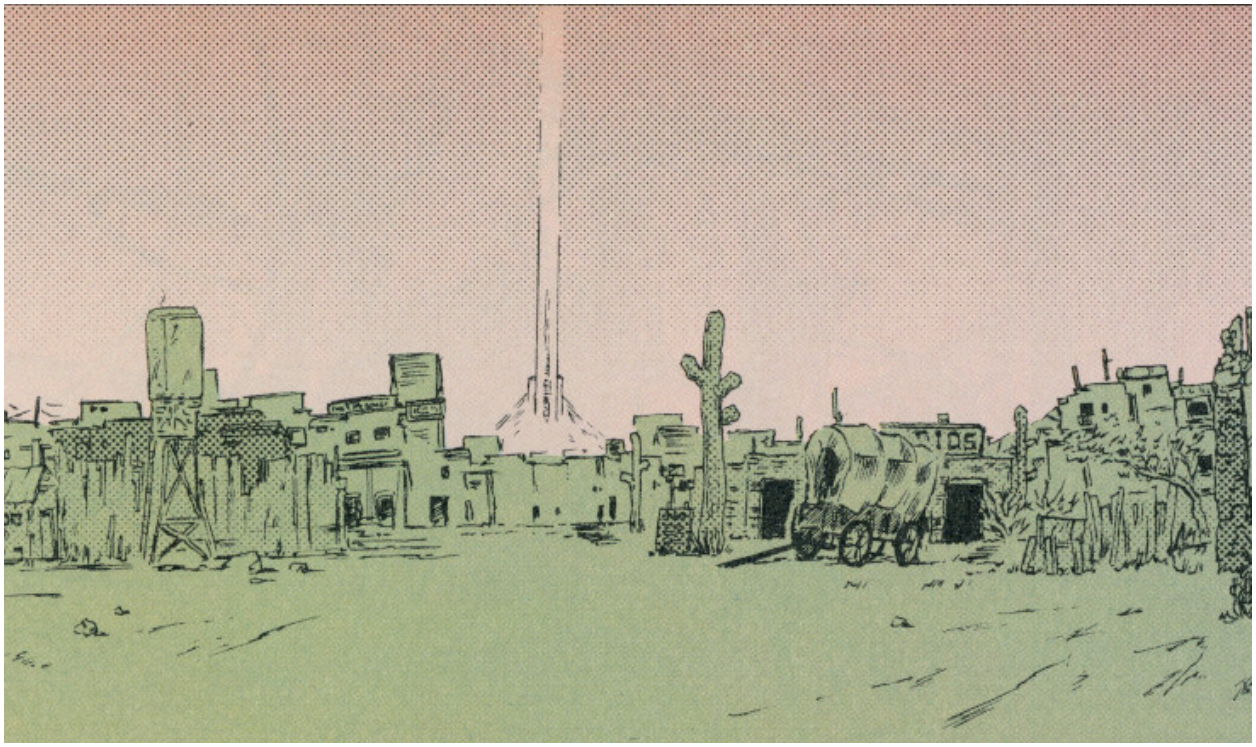
Clackaclackaclacka* *Taptaptap* *Clackaclackaclacka “Swap out everything on the legs by the end of the day!" he says!? And then, I'm headed into the colony so take care of things here immediately after!? And if that wasn't enough, The sub-generator is acting up so fix it ASAP!? *I'm not even really in the military*!!!”

Her loud bantering would be interrupted by a sudden realization. “Sigh… Sitting here complaining won't get anything done… Still…” Hachijo stood up, ceasing her previous duties, and turned to Wilbur

“What a strange looking machine. It's almost like it's naked…”

♦

Hey, You. Were you really built as a tool for killing people? A-Bao marched, alone, in the abandoned Texas Zone, hot on the trail of a much needed Water Processor for the *Pegasus*. Still significantly damaged after its encounter at *Noah* by continued AEUG assaults on the ship since.



I guess this means they aren't always the solution for everything then. His mind is still consumed by the images of past, present, and future as well as the meeting he had with that eager boy.

He looked down at his Bangle-like military watch. A familiar warning flashing. *Minovsky particles…?*

A-Bao took a moment to scan the truly otherworldly scene all about him.

Anyways, what's up with this scenery? This isn't some historical simulation. I should have come riding a horse, it seems like it would be easy enough to find one but... I guess that isn't the case.

This sucks! He couldn't help but chuckle.

♦

"I'm sick of digging through trashed colonies just to find some unspoiled food!" Gilliam lamented his escape from the safety of his AEUG-affiliated cadet military-dorm, he presently stood in a dilapidated home, by the looks of it from three centuries ago, he looked at his friend who averted his gaze, sitting nearby still nursing his pride, Gilliam continued to rant.

"This place doesn't have a future or anything else going for it. Even you would admit that, right? Even so, what else can we do? We're powerless right now. Going out requires money. For the two of us, just wandering aimlessly—" Casval interjected, stopping Gilliam cold in his tracks.

"No one said anything about being aimless!"

"Huh?" He couldn't believe his ears. What *was* Casval's *aim*?

"We do have an aim, Leroy. The white giant, on board that white ship... I've never fallen in love with a piece of metal before. It's the first time I've seen anything so beautiful in my entire life. I want to take it. If only we had that, we could go anywhere. I'm done with dusty, dried-out colonies."

Gilliam's eyes widened, Casval made up his mind, Wilbur would be his.

♦

Back at the Dock, Michijo took a moment to fix some of the dock's lesser equipment; she then followed A-Bao's journey on foot through the dust filled, wasteland-like landscape on a nearby scanner, taking in the scene.

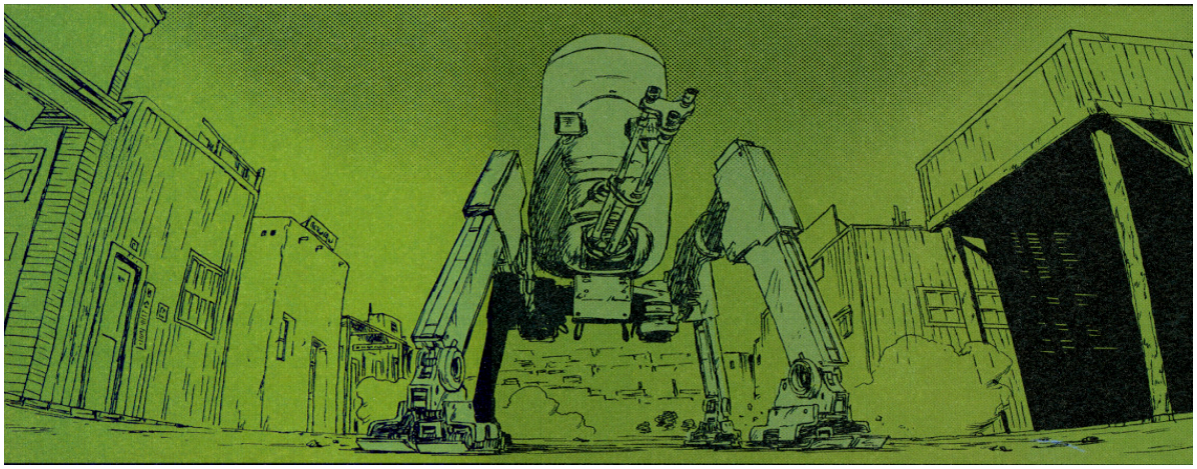
"What's up with this place! The balance between heat conduction and electrical demand is ridiculous!! This means total efficiency is running at lower than fifty percent!? Hm?" She reacted to the clear sound of an enemy IFF indication.

Bee-beep *Bee-beep*

"This heat signature... Don't tell me! A Machining Skin? No, a Machining *Worker*!? Marker you liar... you said *no one* would be here…!"

♦

It gleamed in the high-noon light. A single, fully armed, and automated Machining Worker stood in the midst of the corral. It had four legs and a gatling gun, A-Bao kept his eyes fixed, hiding behind nearby cover about 5 clicks from his enemy, hoping it hadn't yet identified him.



“An armed worker?” A-Bao took these moments to observe the machine carefully, its feet making heavy metal thuds as it stepped down the corral.

Stomp

“Its movements are way too regulated... it's using an automatic control system... is it security…?” taking several more steps, not long afterward, the Machining Worker came to a halt, dust passing its feet. *Chkt* It slowly rotated past the homes and saloon *Click* zeroing in directly at A-Bao’s partially concealed position *Beep*.

“It found me!!” The Worker began rotating its heavy machine cannon and let off a deafening volley. Each round kicked up pillars of sand, a deadly marker of its intent.

Kachunk

Powpowpow *Powpowpow*

“Damn!!” A-Bao jumped to the ground away from the barrage, narrowly avoiding the fate of his cover that was shredded to pieces before his eyes.

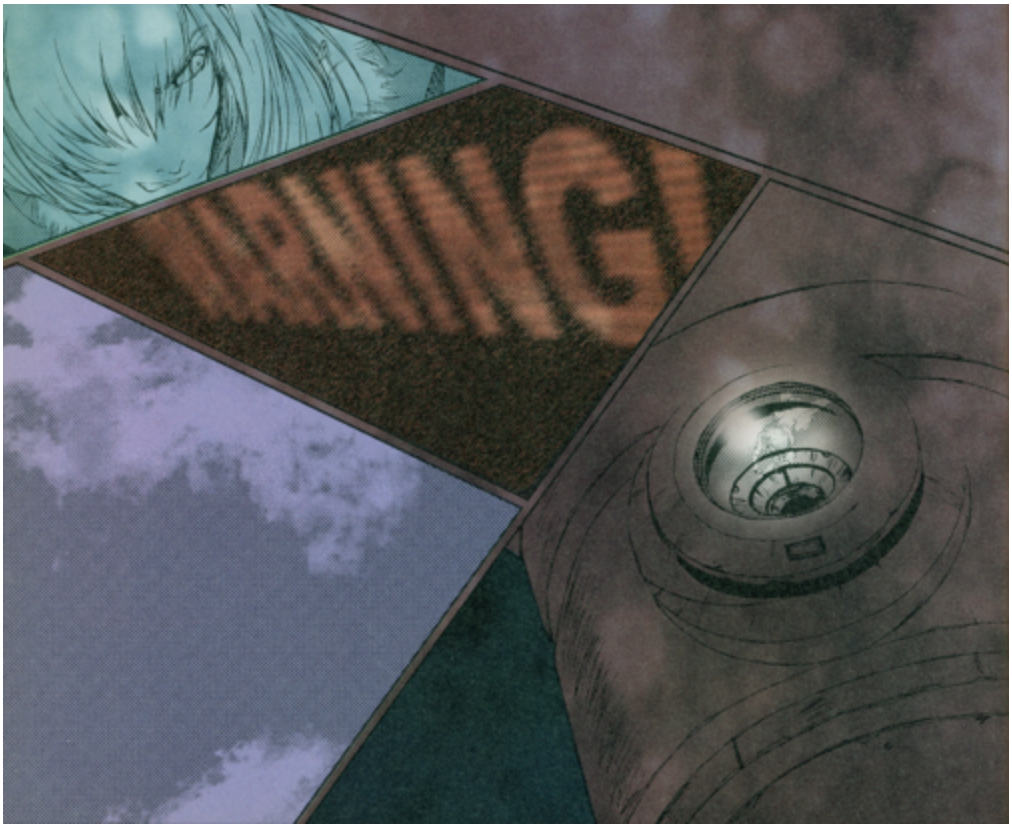
Zrapapapapap

“!!!...” He tumbled out of the way behind a ruined fountain, mere inches of cover keeping him out of sight. A short pause overcame the scene as the Worker repositioned. Then the battlecry of a man could be heard.

“I can't watch this! What a pathetic Esper!!” A-Bao tilted his back and head to face the direction of the dramatic entrance. He recognized them immediately.

“Law!!”

Slugger had soared through the air carrying a large rifle, he began fixing on his target. “It's not your time to die yet, right!? Ling A-Bao!!! This is going to cost you!! Big Time!!!” Slugger was aimed at the camera of the worker, his reflection visible in its fish-eye like lens.



The heavy thud of recoil jolted Slugger's shoulder and the armor piercing round cut like butter through the Worker, destroying its empty cockpit and rendering it inert.

♦

Rumble *Rumble*

"That was the sound of an explosion…" Frankly, the audible sounds of combat in the colony simply shook her and she went to investigate. *All this, for clean water *sigh**

"You'll be okay, right... even if you're by yourself. Wilbur.." Hachijo soothed her nerves, she'd come down from the Pegasus with A-Bao in Wilbur and now she was leaving it behind.

♦

*"*Pathetic… Hey, Ling A-Bao. Are you still alive? If you ain't then give me an answer from hell." The wreck of the Mobile Worker continued to bellow with smoke, its fires growing larger.

[I tell you that Forecast says dying is still further away. Even though the rescuer does not want the rescued one to live. I don't think you came here just to save me. What do you want, Slugger?] A-Bao communicated with Law via his Streamer capabilities, Empath, concealing his position yet heard clear as day.

"As usual, your English is shit. Even if you don't trust me, let's still try to get along. We're employer and employee, after all"

Law slowly patrolled the area, finding A-Bao having moved from his previous obscured position far away from the smoldering wreck of the worker, The explosion having thrown him back.

"With that aside..." Law fixed the Stakeout Shotgun to his hip, pointed directly at A-Bao's chest. Bellowing smoking not far behind him.

"It was a good thing I followed you. Something stinks about an armed machining worker creeping around a deserted colony. "What's your purpose here? You're going to tell me, right? Ling A-Bao!!"

The Pegasus PA system cracked like lightning “T-they're here!!” Bright sat on his bed, pulling a shirt over his bare chest, preparing to fix his uniform for duty and report to the bridge. A female figure laid on his same bed, pulling a pilot suit across her contoured, high-fashion figure, it was Sayla.

“We're also getting a level 2 battle station order from the *Hull*!!!” The interruption met Frau as she attempted to catch Kittakima who was having fun flustering her with a game of tag. Blissfully indifferent to their situation and Frau’s distressed gaze.

“On the third battle line! The shape and composition are too similar to only be rocks!” Marker alerted the entire crew to the evolving situation, the IFF was without doubt Machining Skins were on their way, fast, far faster than the Blondies they encountered thus far.

“It's the enemy!!

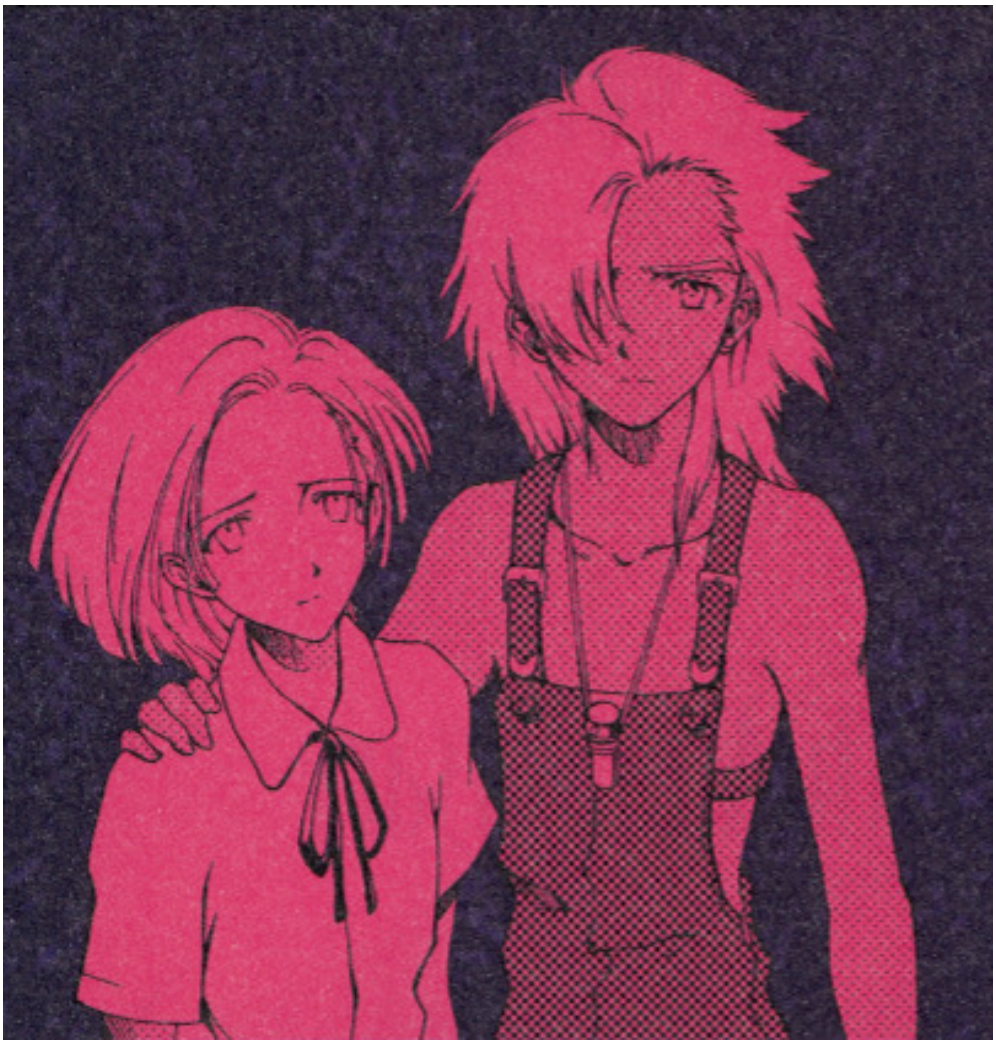
“A...amazing... I can't even describe it. Something about it is completely different from those brown machining skins…” Oscar was in awe as a squadron of **Dietrich D.O.M.**(D.D.) bared down on them.

♦

Back in the dock, Casval and Leeroy had come face to face with their objective. The tall White Machining Skin was left virtually abandoned by Hachijo and A-Bao in light of their battle. Gilliam couldn't find the words, almost cowering at the sight of the machine behind Casval.

"Gunboy Wilbur… As long as we have this we can go anywhere we want. Once we're out of this rusty old dump the future will be ours…"

The Boys, paired like Brothers, prepared to make their escape and board the Wilbur.



Revise Revive Revival

THE STORY SO FAR…

Several months have passed since enemy machining skins launched a raid on the space colony Noan. Losing its senior crew in the attack, the Earth Federation's newest battleship Pegasus takes on evacuating civilians and escapes the scene. Thanks to the unexpected efforts of Rin A-Bao and the other pilot candidates they continue to survive their battles, all while following Federation orders to draw out the enemy's battleship, *Zanzibar*.

They've currently been instructed to infiltrate one of the neutral gravity regions between the Earth and Moon. Known as the Texas Zone, this shoal zone is named after its sole surviving inhabitant and a remnant of the war, an abandoned colony, its mirrors stopped and currently undergoing desertification.

Machijio Shima, a member of the mechanic crew, and A-Bao break into the colony with the Gunboy Wilbur. Inside, A-Bao is attacked by an armed and automated machining worker. Pursuing A-Bao into the colony, the mercenary Slugger Law appears in time to save him, only to raise his gun at A-Bao as he demands to know his reason for being there.

As the two face off, the Pegasus receives a Level 2 Battle Stations alert from Flagship *Hull*. Further complicating things, two boys have appeared at the dock, intending to take control of both Wilbur and their own futures. This is a story preceding the novel, told through a flash of imagery.

Bright entered the bridge, comfortable in his still acting position. “Give me a report.”

“We just received an order to go to level 2 battle stations. Koo and Hayato just sortied in their Orvilles but—” Oscar’s report required clarification. Bright gently leapt towards the occupied operator’s chair, scanning his screen and letting the low gravity suspend him and interjected.

“Ram went with them to the Mister Ball?”

“Affirmative.”

“The Flagship *Hull* is telling us to hurry up, what do you suggest?” Bright looked to Oscar, a second chance after *Noah* at gestures of trust.

“I mean even if they say that… A-Bao and Shima are still inside the Colony, I can’t get a hold of them.” It was not the answer Bright expected, the Operator simply hit the ball back into his court, and Bright wasn’t about to start babysitting now.

“It's fine. Let A-Bao do as he wants, It's better not to expect too much out of him.” He began to motion away from the Operator.

“R-roger that. —Ah, Captain, where are you going? If this is about Ensign Yashima, someone else can go. Please stay here…” His signature fear was replaced with a sheepish request. But Bright didn’t relent.

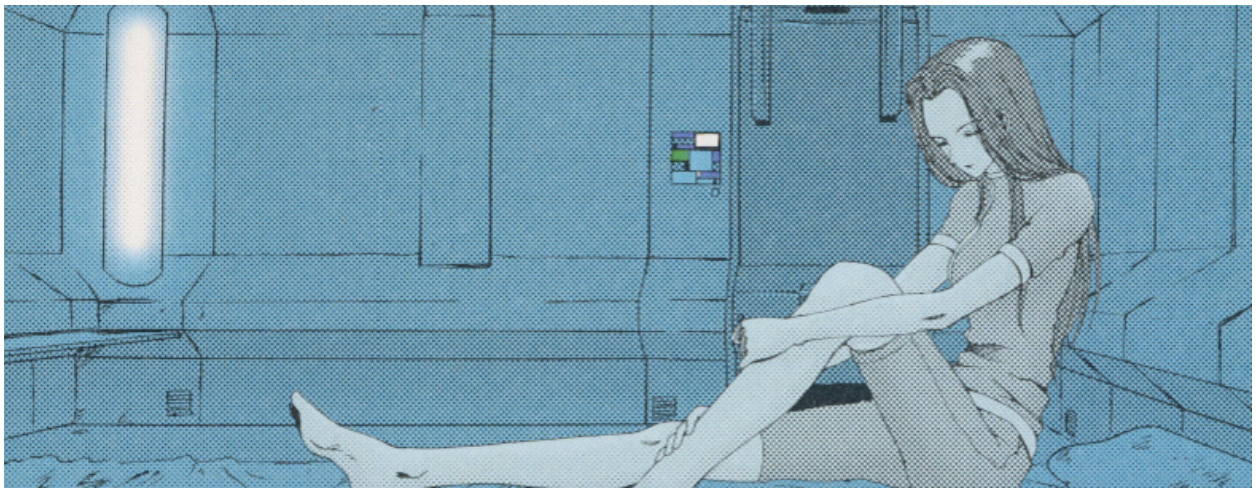
“No, it's fine. I'll go, don't worry about it.”

“But, Captain…”

Worry isn't the problem here… Bright left the bridge, at a moment like this, he just needed to relax. On the way down the Pegasus’ corridors, he reflected on all they’d seen since that fateful day at Barrel 7.

It really is something that we've survived this long with nothing but amateurs… No matter how cutting edge the ship might be… it still needs a good crew. For just a moment his mind flashed to Mirai, who took the time to rest, and Oscar's request.

There's no way we can just float through space on luck alone.



♦

"Why the hell did you come here? It doesn't matter when you're gonna die; you're the only one making a big deal about it."

A-Bao smirked at Law's threats

"Depending on your answer, that death you've been dreaming about might arrive sooner than you thought. After all, everyone has to die sooner or later." Slugger's face was nothing short of a maddened gunman, bearing a grin and eyes fixed.

"That's right. But this age has nothing but greed and apathy in it. I can't find any other motivation." A-Bao taunted.

"Shut up already! You were the one that came to me with your own selfish motives. It's been several months now, if this is going to go on any longer it's

about time we update our contract. Wouldn't you agree? Ling A-Bao. I'm not bullshitting here!!" A-Bao was puzzled yet didn't interrupt Law.

"*That* should be enough to cover the renewal fee. It's useless to me as a part of Operation V and the Pegasus, but I'll have buyers tripping over themselves to get to it."

He wanted Wilbur…

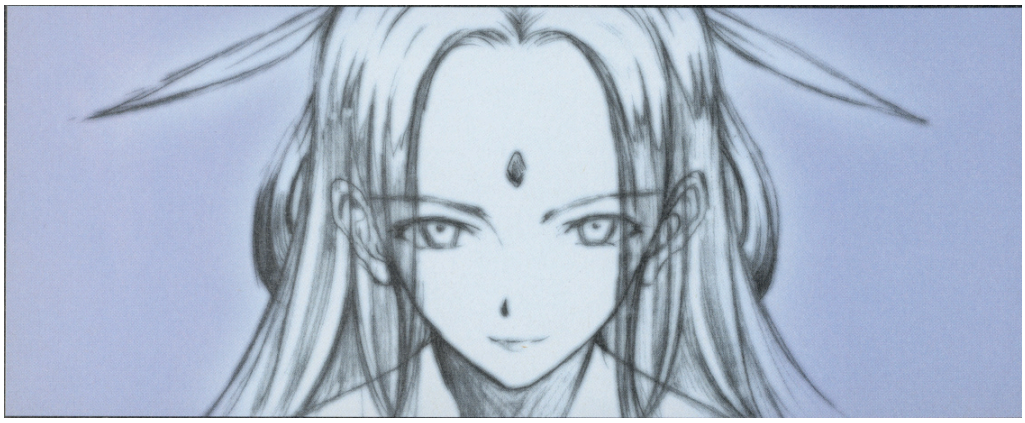
"It's true, your arrival on that day brought me out of hell. But you know… Whose decision was it to drop me, a meathead baseball player, into the depths of hell anyways? Who was it that drove me to the point where I can no longer trust a single person?" A buzzard loomed overhead, sensing the overture before a meal came.

"I had baseball taken from me. I had my friends taken from me. I had my life taken from me and I had my belief in people, My heart, taken away from me. "I was shocked to hear the sound of my own voice for the first time in months. I spent days trying to moisturize and repair my cracked lips."

A-Bao could visualize the dugout, hear the roar of the crowd: Baseball played in all its glory; it contrasted Law's dejected demeanor.

"It was at that moment I realized the extent to which a human is a vessel with the capability to despair. The lost vitality in my eyes was replaced with negativity. You understand them, right? The feelings I'm dealing with right now." A-Bao's face turned stern as Law "Have you ever heard the accursed voice inside me, that keeps repeating itself over and over?"

“I’ve just been itching to kill you this whole time.”



♦

The two boys summoned nearby scaffolding of the Dock, a virtual stairwell formed up to Wilbur's cockpit. While Casval proceeded yet Leroy paused.

“On second thought let's stop this, Casval!! It's too dangerous!!”

“What are you getting cold feet for? Why else did we spend half a year rebuilding and training on that machining worker!? This is the Federation's latest tech we're talking about, even if we sell it we'll be set for life!” Casval had marched to a small elevator built into the scaffold-staircase; it stopped by Wilbur's head, Casval climbed in, his voice echoing slightly.

“Just stay down there and watch- Buh!!” He stumbled

“Casval!!”

Not skipping a beat, Casval rose, “I'm okay, my hand just slipped…That was close…Why on Earth would anyone have come here…?”

“Oh! So this is the gunner.” remarked Gilliam, Casval ignored his ally continuing to accustom himself with Wilbur.

“This thing sure is heavy. And then the caster is connected here...

I guess I can't view the manual without the suit. Is it tucked away somewhere?!" He dug and tossed around the Chinese rendered text of its monitors doing him no favors "Gotta switch the OS language to English." Gilliam stared on, certain Casval would succeed.

♦

Gagh, the air is really dirty here...It smells…" Hachijo arrived in the dusty town A-Bao and Law had, her hand covering her face, she could hear the continuing sounds of, what seemed, a one sided battle.

What was that explosion just now? I wonder if that moron is okay...

♦

Now, it was A-Bao's turn to lecture Law. They were now a few paces from each other near the porch of an abandoned house.

"I'll tell you. All about what you're looking for…To gain the present and future I paid with my past. It's not like I'm obsessed with it, There are just a few things that caught my interest. Before the war, a paper was published called "On Measuring the Expansion of Mental Limits According to the Environment". It was full of sketchy research about "the changes and effects life in space would have on humanity.

And at the very moment this theory of "streamers" appeared,

The so-called Flanagan Institute provided detailed data substantiating it. It was as if they already had the proof.The sample they used for their research was a Taiwanese boy.

In other words, me."

Law felt the jerk of an unseen force that didn't miss the beat, torn from his grip, the shotgun floated momentarily before shattering into fragments. Law was dumbfounded, *what the fuck!?* Yet A-Bao continued.

“The devil's own powers; "The Nine". Remember this: I'm not the next step in human evolution. Even if people adapted to living in space, there's no way they would ever gain these monstrous powers.. In the depths of my memories I saw a demon; a jade-eyed girl I know there’s a link between us. When and where was it? Why is it that I'm so scared of her?”

Hachijo had finally found the two of them, but she was too horrified or perhaps transfixed at the scene to say anything, she was listening with a keen interest to A-Bao’s words, having witnessed the force of The Nine with her own eyes.Yet couldn’t put the scene together.

“The Flanagan Institute created the original four from me, the true original. Why am I so afraid then? This isn't a premonition. I felt limitless terror from her.

If her forecast is stronger than mine, then everything I've seen becomes useless. The world will end up twisted by her power. Yet then I felt the key to opposing her appear here in *this* Zone: the "Leaping Light"!!

Hachijo was at a loss, what was unfolding before her?

♦

Vrrrrrrm

The Wilbur rushed forward, Casval piloting it, down the Texas Zone Dock to Outer Space. Gilliam had been left behind but he cried out at his friend’s sortie Mobile Workers were one thing, but this was taking things to a whole new *level*.

“Stop! Come back!! Casval, come back!!” It was futile, and before a moment was done, Casval soared down the Dock’s bays.

Seizing the white machine, the boy's desires run wild!

GHOST

THE STORY SO FAR

Several months after enemy machining skins launch a raid on the space colony Noah, the Earth Federation's newest battleship Pegasus, having lost all of its senior command in the attack, reaches the shoal region known as the Texas Zone.

Together A-bao and Gunboy Wilbur, along with mechanic crew member Hachijo Shima, infiltrate the abandoned Texas colony. A-bao has found someone possessing "Leap Light" here, the power necessary to strike back against Lalah Sung, the girl who burrowed and now leaks deep within his psyche.

Hearing an explosion from within the colony, an uneasy Hachijo leaves the dock to investigate. In shock, she witnesses A-bao facing off against the mercenary Slugger Law... and the manifestation of A-bao's own unique abilities.

Meanwhile, two boys enter the dock. Casval Bailey, with Leroy Gilliam in tow, hopes to steal the Wilbur for his own, but it is in fact Casval himself who holds the power A-bao seeks. Seizing hold of the future he desires, Casval departs for space inside the Wilbur.

This tale in a flash of imagery, portends the future of "For The Barrel".

Casval was plagued by every insult, every negative, Minus, it all poured in, the negative feelings directed at him, the sins of his parentage, of his father. Losing his job, all of it.

“SHUT UP!!!”

YOU’RE A DISGUSTING EARTHNOID

THATS RIGHT

“EVERYONE JUST SHUT UP ALREADY!!!

A FILTHY EARTHNOID

“S-”

THAT’S RIGHT, THAT’S RIGHT

“STOOOOOOP!!!..!!” *HUH?*

♦

This era is all about abandoning the old gods. You don't ever hear of somebody running into a new one. But it seems a country by the name of India, on the outskirts of Earth, is home to more than 33 million gods.

Casval raced down the docks hangers and into its bay, the Wilbur raced through the tunnel, dancing on the precipice of life and death in the cramped corridors. He continued remembering his

Zooooooooom

One of them is a god that destroys things. It's a very popular story with the commonfolk.

“What's wrong with this handling!! Slow down!!”

As Casval continued thinking to himself the Wilbur’s engines roared to life. *Boom* it made him uneasy but thus far Casval had piloted the Wilbur gracefully. Though he entered a somersault to try and gain control on his speed.

♦

Casval's memory brought him back to Argo Farm, back in the Carribean, it was the day they let him go, his chest pumping with adrenaline and rage "YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME FOR NO REASON ASSHOLE!! YOU CAN'T JUST FIRE ME!! His boss had just let him go.

"You don't like it? I thought it was perfect for a barbarian such as yourself. You're cursed, boy. Nothing's been right since you came here" Casval's tough demeanor melted at the thought of being cursed…*cursed*…

GODDAMN ACCUSED EARTHOID!

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR SAVAGERY!

THAT'S RIGHT!

TOO SAVAGE AND ALWAYS TOO EMOTIONAL!!!!

THIS IS WHY I HATE EARTHNOIDS!!

THAT'S RIGHT!!

♦

Someone once said that outer space was a place free of prejudice, but that was just a load of shit. Casval made his final ascent to the exit of the Zone, the stars gleaming.

Whoooooosh

I'm going to smash apart this phony world.

I'll finally turn into a god that can destroy things

He cleared the rings of the Colony's exit, streaming across the stars, before coming to a slow but sure deceleration. His body was exhausted from the gees endured yet he was happy as could be, attempting to fight it.

"Haah! I've finally got it…

"Ha ha ha"

"Ha ha ha"

Using my own power alone...I can do it with this!

Hah

hah

hah!

I got this far thanks to me and no one else!! I can become a god of destruction!!" Yet as he uttered this he passed out, his plain overalls not protecting him from Wilbur's speed. Wilbur remained unable to move, suspended in space.

♦

The Pegasus was engaged in fighting against the *Zanzibar*. Cramble Karela sortied in a D.D., while Lalah supported him in the L-MESS. Challia Bull was not far behind. *Zanzibar* recently reinforced its D.D. acted with blinding speed. Minovsky particles affected the Zanzibar and L-MESS' guns, allowing *Pegasus* to cut across the battlefield in a narrowing pocket of respite.

"Incoming! 30 seconds to contact at the starboard bow!! Get ready for impact!" Oscar cried.

Bright reiterated the words of his operator, “All hands! Brace for impact!!”

“What about Wilbur!?” Bright couldn’t believe A-Bao, *what the hell was he doing at a moment like this?*

“It hasn't budged ever since leaving the dock-” Oscar was interrupted by the impact of an enemy rocket.

Craaaaaash

The Pegasus thudded, The enemy was armed with a mix of Bazookas, 120mm Cannons, and Mega Particle Cannons in the case of bigger craft. Like between Scylla and Charybdis, each round whispering death.

“Hachijo, what are you doing down there!?”

♦

Back in Texas Zone, A-Bao, Slugger, and Hachijo stood at a stand-off between each other, the air was tense enough to cut through, still, what does she even say?

“*Tsk* Wha—”

A-Bao and Slugger snapped to face the intruder in their battle. Slugger was embarrassed “Shi—Hachijo…”, he knew how she viewed him, this wasn’t what she needed to see. A-Bao simply leered at her,“!!” his silence spoke.

Hachijo found her voice, she barked at both of them “What the.....The hell are you guys doing!!” A-Bao had no answer, Hachijo was a foreigner to everything being discussed. This served no purpose but to confuse her. Yet A-Bao was interrupted just as quickly, Intuition cracked, he realized the goal of his journey, here, to the Texas Zone.

“Ugh! I see now! He's the one I'm looking for!!” He saw Casval, asleep in the Wilbur having been knocked out cold by the gees of its engines. “He's the one

with the Leap Light to resist that demon!!" His mind became flooded with images of their meeting earlier, it all came together.

Take me into battle with you! I'll make a good soldier!!

Leroy! A-Bao's noticed that we're here!!

I've... I've done something I can never take back...

A-Baoooooo

"What's all this about then? What's all this about?"

"Captain."

The revelation was broken by the entrance of another surprise party. He carried Leeroy Gilliam in one hand. Everyone present knew him.

"Ram Dowai!!!" A-Bao was happy to see an ally rather than another enemy appear.

"It sounded like the circus was in-town, and look at that, a bunch of clowns. The smoke is a big giveaway too." Ram continued "We'll talk later, A brat took off in A-Bao's Wilbur." He motioned towards Gilliam who was helpless in Ram's grasp. Law and Hachijo simply stared at Ram, still surprised he was there.

"Don't you think that's a problem? Let's get going." A-Bao and the group made their way back without a further word. They'd have to take Ram's Mister Ball, it was the only means of escape available.

Packed like a can of sardines, They left, intent on meeting Wilbur.

The Ball was cramped, yet Ram was able to fit each of his friends, and "prisoner", in the small Machining Worker turned military platform. Still, Slugger's hands wandered, settling on Hachijo's ass.

"Hey! Keep your hands to yourself!!" She smacked him just as quickly as his hand rested.

"Come on, keep it down. It's cramped in here." Ram carefully piloted the Ball, making sure to both keep the ride comfortable and safe to Wilbur. However Law wouldn't quit, looking for support.

"A-Bao! She's sure got a big ass, huh? Back me up here.". Gilliam was just beside himself *THIS was Casval's aim!?*

"You're the one who's too big! Move over more!!" Hachijo retorted, clearly ignoring the complement regardless of how she really felt. Yet A-Bao ignored the scene. He could feel the presence, the demon, she'd followed them here, since Noah. Worse, he could feel her pressure coming down and he reached out with Dive, *Casval!*

Don't die.

You can't die...

You can't die now...

We haven't even met yet…

♦

Wha…

"Wha…"

"A dream?"

Casval awoke to a nightmarish scene, he was completely bounded, arms and legs, even neck. "Who's out there?" He was in a space outside of time, the

voices all around him murmuring. Casval was unaware of just how much Minus had begun to affect him just as he had left the Dock. “Let me go you bastard!! What's going on here!?” The voice's volume and grotesque visage had grown deafening.

A savage controlled by his anger, solving every problem with violence.

You're a filthy Earthnoid.

You should hurry up and go back to Earth.

Self-serving, not a care for anyone else.

That's completely right.

You know everyone hates you.

Right, right!

Bailey shook himself awake, an AEUG Blondie had spotted him. He was stricken with terror. As it turned to face him the emotion welled more and more, and he couldn’t take it anymore. This pressure, this pain, this was what he’d said he’d wanted..*this?*

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

Chapter 12 “Kuzco Al—The Irregular”

He was surrounded by darkness.

The hood of his helmet, filled with the quiet sound of his breathing, reflected the orange light of the instrument clusters. It was proof that the craft’s tiny mechanisms still had life left in them.

However, there was only enough fuel left to make a few more course corrections. It occurred to Ensign Ling A-Bao that the blinking light indicating that every movement was being recorded to memory wasn’t unlike the flickering of his own life.

With no target flight path, the escape capsule known as a core block continued its solitary trek on inertia alone, both the Moon and the Earth behind it.

Inside the capsule he had reached a single conclusion—one that governed all of his actions.

I want to keep living. I want to survive, and make it back to the *Pegasus* again.

The conclusion he reached at the end of his drifting surprised A-Bao himself.

Several months had passed since the *Pegasus* escaped from Barrel 7’s *Noah* colony. In that time, A-Bao had changed ever so slightly. The thorns that covered his entire body were gradually disappearing, plus he had been able to keep piloting the Machining Skin that he once refused to board.

After the fear of fighting in space had been instilled in someone, it wasn’t an easy thing to overcome. It wasn’t as simple as a child who couldn’t swim conquering their fear of the water. Naturally, that fear remained deep inside

A-Bao even now, but the fact was that once he was out in space there was nowhere to hide from it.

Nor was there any escape from the repeated attacks. Being cornered led to A-Bao feeling a sense of responsibility and inevitability which resulted in him taking up his place in the cockpit.

Slugger Law laughed, saying that A-Bao had just gotten numb to it.

“That’s just the way you stop feeling anything. It’s the same for you, the same for me. Those girls, the kids, everyone.”

That might be so, A-Bao thought.

There was probably some truth in Slugger’s words, seeing how even the introverted Frau Bohr had changed.

Back when several AEUG commandos infiltrated the *Pegasus*, A-Bao watched firsthand when Frau shot and killed one of the young soldiers. He would never be able to forget the dim glint in her eyes at that moment.

Fighting against discomfort, anxiety, fear and guilt was a terrible drain on a person’s vitality. That’s why people unconsciously stop thinking. And that’s how everyone becomes numb.

There was no sense of justice, no malice, no hostility. Nothing. They just focus on processing reality as it comes, as if it was an assembly line. That was the situation aboard this ill-equipped warship, an assemblage of people without a shred of political thought between them.

Every single person here was exhausted. A-Bao was no different.

Exhaustion chips away at a person's motivation.

Once a person had lost their motivation, there was only one of two ways they could go.

Give up, or continue to ride out the situation.

A-Bao hadn't given up. That is to say, he hadn't found a place where he could give up.

Because the *Pegasus* was there. He couldn't leave the *Pegasus*, couldn't leave the cockpit, couldn't leave the embrace of a woman's body. Exhaustion had even robbed him of the strength to blame himself.

And then, while engaged in battle inside the region known as the Texas Zone, Wilbur was caught in the nuclear explosion of Karela and L-MESS within the Texas colony, causing its disintegration. Everyone in the crew thought that the old A-Bao would have been able to escape the explosion and return safely to the *Pegasus*. A-Bao himself thought so as well.

However, when A-Bao saw the light of that approaching explosion, he abruptly had the urge to be absorbed by it.

On the off-chance that he would have returned to the ship, he wouldn't tell them that he had wanted to see how it felt being swallowed up in the explosion. The pilot psych eval wasn't so lenient that he would have been allowed to continue after saying something like that.

However, it was the truth that a destructive ecstasy had surged through his entire being in the moment that his body was engulfed by the flash.

It had already been nine hours and three minutes since the core block had been ejected from Wilbur.

He wondered how far he had drifted…

A-Bao pulled a thin simulator about the size of a pocket calculator from out of the sideboard and worked out the core block's current location.

It went without saying, but this was a situation where he couldn't afford to waste the remaining battery in not just the vehicle, but in his own pilot suit as well. Opening a small hatch overhead, he let the filtered light hit the simulator's solar panels.

According to his calculations, the core block hadn't yet escaped from the Texas Zone.

He had traveled slower than he expected…

The thing that worried A-Bao was colliding with debris (space dust), micrometeorites or any other multitude of unidentified flying object clusters moving through the shoal zone. Running into debris was one of the possible outcomes that had a high likelihood of actually happening.

Taking into account the possibility of an emergency sortie, the cockpit was pressurized at 1 atm, the same as it would be aboard the mothership or on Earth. Without decompression, the pilot suit he was wearing would instantly swell up like a balloon if hurled out into space. Even if decompression started at the moment the core block was ejected, it would take more than a dozen hours for a normal person to reach 0.27 atm, and on top of that the helmet and suit would need to be removed during that time, as decompression targets not only the physical body but clothing as well. If there was an incident stemming from a collision and that person was thrown naked into space, the moisture in their

body would quickly evaporate. In either case, suited or not, the odds of survival couldn't be called good.

He was out of ideas. There was nothing else to do but minimize oxygen usage, conserve his strength as best he could and wait for someone to find him.

If he happened to be picked up by an Anti-Earth Union Group ship, A-Bao would have no choice but to prioritize security over safety and destroy the core block. The Core Block System wasn't there to protect the pilot. It was there to protect the machine's data. The pilot was there to manage it—nothing more than added insurance.

There was no other option but to leave things up to fate. That, and the conclusion he had previously arrived at.

Ah…I want to keep living.

I want to survive, and make it back to the *Pegasus* again.

Something about drifting alone in space made him feel that way for the first time.

It was an unexpected thought, and he couldn't entirely figure out the reason behind it.

However, right now he had a deep longing to see the faces of the crew.

I want to survive, and I want to see them again. That was when he likely figured out the reason.

That was why, right now, he was going to sleep. In order to keep up the strength needed to survive, I need to get a little sleep, he thought.

A sense of weightlessness blanketed his entire body, as if he was floating outside the confines of the core block. In his comfort, A-Bao didn't notice the large light currently approaching.

♦

He heard giggling. It seemed to go on forever.

It certainly wasn't a disagreeable sound.

After all, wondering about the source of that pleasantness was the starter that allowed him to get his thoughts in order.

Once he realized that it was a woman's stifled laughter, A-Bao felt his mind quickly awakening.

Filled with the urge to see where he was, A-Bao opened his eyes. From out of an unfocused glare, his surroundings slowly began to take shape. It was the glare of a light that he knew well. The unique glare of the lights used in a military spacecraft's protective mesh.

A warship!

He stiffened at the realization that he was onboard an unknown vessel. And then he began to worry about the possibility that this was an AEUG ship.

"I see you're awake…are you feeling alright?"

Maybe this was the woman who had been laughing. She peered at him, her face blocking the light.

“Can you understand what I’m saying?”

Her voice sprang from her lips. It was cheerful and carefree.

That chestnut hair tickled something in his memories. A-Bao was shocked.

“It’s been some time, hasn’t it?” She continued to speak in a sunny voice.

He knew exactly who the woman in front of him was. His memories were all too clear. Dubiously he reexamined each one, but by and large he could remember everything in the order it had happened.

“Your hair’s gotten longer, and you’ve changed your perfume too.”

His memories had slightly returned. It was the awakening of the deep psyche from a coma, in other words, an indication that the start of activity in the cerebral cortex, which people generally forget to use, had led to a part of his unconscious mind rising to the surface.

“I remember now,” A-Bao said. “You’ve gotten very pretty, Kuzco Al.”

Kuzco Al. A member of the Original Four. The battleship that picked up A-Bao belonged to her.

Chapter 13 “Kuzco Al 2—The Escape”

[A typo in the magazine identifies two of the helmets as belonging to Slugger. This has been corrected both in the plain text and the edited image version of my translation. -TheIdeon]

“Can you understand what I’m saying?”

Her voice sprang from her lips. It was cheerful and carefree.

That chestnut hair tickled something in his memories. A-Bao was shocked.

“It’s been some time, hasn’t it?” She continued to speak in a sunny voice.

He knew exactly who the woman in front of him was. His memories were all too clear. Dubiously he reexamined each one, but by and large he could remember everything in the order it had happened.

“Your hair’s gotten longer, and you’ve changed your perfume too.”

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“I remember now,” A-Bao said. “You’ve gotten very pretty, Kuzco Al.”

Kuzco Al. A member of the Original Four. The battleship that picked up A-Bao belonged to her.

A-Bao examined his body, tracing a path from his head to his neck, down his spine and to his tailbone. There was no pain or discomfort. He felt a little bit of his unease fade. Gingerly pressing his elbows downward, he propped up his upper body. Although the one-third normal gravity was a relief, the long hours spent in his pilot suit had been harder on his joints than he expected.

Kuzco continued to watch him, never breaking her smile. Despite being much older than A-Bao, her expression was one of admiration, like she was seeing an older brother who had matured into a splendid adult. At the same time, it was like she was looking at the man he used to be. It was a gentle smile, equal parts nostalgic, joyful and proud. The meaning behind her look was shared in their past. The two of them had been born in the same house, grown in the same soil.

“Where is this ship headed?” The windows in the room were shuttered, with no way to tell what was outside. Knowing what that meant, A-Bao asked.

“Side 6. We’re scheduled to dock at Palda Bay…are you okay to be moving around?”

“I’m fine, it’s not like I took a direct hit. What happened to my capsule?”

“It’s been moored to the deck.” Sitting in a chair with her nicely proportioned legs crossed, Kuzco’s reply was free of deceit. Under normal circumstances, A-Bao’s questions, as well as his attitude, weren’t the sort of things that would be tolerated from a prisoner taken aboard an enemy ship. However, there was truly no need for lies or pretense between these two.

“What will you do now?”

The white-walled room was silent save for the hum of the air purification fans and the reverberations of the warship. Kuzco looked at A-Bao’s body as he turned away. His skin was pallid—the painful looking scars of human experimentation and numerous injections still remained across his back.

The house they had been raised in was Flanagan's laboratory. That was where Kuzco first met A-Bao. The boy, much younger than herself, was lying inside of an enormous dome, countless cables hooked up all over his body. She couldn't see his expression through the glass, but there was something that automatically entered her mind.

(People that were different were brought here; many other people, but I'm the only one that survived. You'll be able to make it. I can tell. But…it's going to hurt. It's going to hurt a lot, and it will be very hard but…don't give up.)

That was how Kuzco was greeted by A-Bao, as he was being subjected to endless experiments and unable to move. The encouragement from a boy more than a decade her junior succeeded in slightly thawing out Kuzco's frozen heart. She still remembered that meeting, and she found it very sweet that she would be reminded of that time by looking at A-Bao's scars.

Just like A-Bao, she had been used as a research subject and experienced extreme pain and suffering, which brought her to where she was today. When it came to quantity, there wasn't much difference between her own scars, hidden underneath her suit.

Even if there was a reason that they'd been separated as enemies, that pain, and their survival, was something that only they could understand, and something that they continued to share.

Right now, the scars that she saw whenever she looked in a mirror, the abhorrent scars that she only wished would disappear when she gave her body over to a man, felt like the bond linking her and A-Bao.

"…Do you want to go somewhere? …With me."

Her happiness took her thoughts and put them into words. Even though she knew how foolish it was to trust the much younger boy with escaping this place,

Kuzco still said it. It was the result of living as an abnormality, struggling against her own latent madness and the exhaustion that came from the day to day realities of war, and it all came spilling out in front of the boy named A-Bao, with whom she had once shared a life.

“What if we ran off together?”

A-Bao still had a heart, and Kuzco’s anachronistic choice of words was enough to pierce it.

“…That sounds nice. Where to?” A-Bao asked.

“Let’s see…maybe the Earth…”

When and where had they seen that scene before?

The towering, blue sky and the gentle breeze. Countless white wind turbines standing over the expansive plains. The smell of grass, the smell of the soil.

The scenery stretched onward between the two.

Even if it was an implanted memory, as long as there was someone else to share it with there was reason to be sad.

However, the boy in front of her still hadn’t given into the despair of living in reality. He still stood upright in the face of sadness and tragedy, overconfident that there was something that could be done.

“The future, Kuzco Al. I’ll bring you to the future.”

“The future…”

“That’s right. The future.”

Because that’s the place I was born. A-Bao was about to say that, but he kept his mouth shut.

The youth was still a youth, believing that everything he does will lead to good, selfishly trying to push forward.

“That’s right…you’re a boy.”

It made part of her happy, but as a woman Kuzco was saddened.

(Ah…I’ve been rejected.)

The thought welled up at the back of her mind.

“Will you take me there? To the future…”

Right now, those words were all Kuzco could manage.

“…There’s something that I have to do in order for that to happen. For that to happen…there are some people that I need to meet with one last time. Do you understand, Kuzco?”

As he spoke, the childishness A-Bao’s face once possessed was gone.

“…It’s fine. I won’t hold you here. Flanagan won’t learn about this either.”

“Thank you, Kuzco.”

Using the wall-mounted control panel, she opened the shutters on the window. Side 6. A neutral side, supporting neither the Earth Federation nor the AEUG. Because of that, it had stayed out of the current war.

There were two twinkling lights ahead of the bow of the ship. One of those was probably the port bearing the name Palda Bay. At this rate, it wouldn't take more than fifteen minutes to reach.

"Hey…one last thing before you go. The people you need to meet again, are they the people on your ship?"

Kuzco asked.

"Yeah, that's right. They're a useless bunch that can't do anything if I'm not around."

"I see…I hope I can meet them."

Kuzco's glistening, silver eyes sparkled. From the bottom of his heart, A-Bao sincerely thought that she was beautiful.

"You will. Just a little bit longer…you definitely will."

"Thank you, A-Bao. …We'll be docking soon."

As they got closer to the port, the two could feel the distance between them starting to grow. It was almost time to say goodbye. Kuzco was still unaware. That she would fall in love with a member of the *Pegasus*' crew. And that she would end up dying by his hand.

A-Bao's precognition hadn't told him yet either.

♦

Born during a deep snowfall, he spent only a short time in the tranquility of the snowy countryside. White breath. The cold of the north. He had lived in space for as far back as he could remember. However, when he dreamt he still saw the snowy landscape of his early days.

He had never been very good at talking. There was nothing he felt like talking about, nothing that he particularly wanted to express. And even if there was, the more he talked the more he felt his words derailing from his thoughts. It frustrated him, so he repeated himself, and the more he repeated himself the more frustrated he became. Was it a deficiency of emotion, or a lack of it entirely? He wasn't sure himself, but after learning the word "inhibition" he no longer felt like his feelings were being oppressed by some powerful force. Maybe it was the fault of that snowy cold. The emotions welling up inside were cooled down by the memories of that snow. That's how he thought of it. But when he saw that guy, and when he saw that guy with her, his blood boiled. All reason flew out the window, and a voice screamed from inside him. It was an emotional release. The first time he had ever felt it. "To become emotional." It was the first time in his life that he understood the meaning of that phrase.

The girl—Frau Bohr, was gazing at that guy. He didn't want to think that it was jealousy. He was thinking emotionally. Acting emotionally. He couldn't stand seeing Frau look at that guy. That's why I'll surpass him, he thought. That's why I followed after him and enlisted…

A-Bao had been missing for a few days. Every one of the *Pegasus*' crew was dealing with the anxiety over A-Bao's whereabouts in their own way. However, only Subayashi Hayato, Gunboy Orville pilot, remained silent.

Chapter 14 “Kuzco Al 3—The Supporter”

A half-year into their voyage and the crew of the *Pegasus*, initially no more than a rag-tag bunch, had come to embrace their own roles and duties, performing them without complaint.

The ship was figuring out a set of rules suitable to the motley personalities aboard, and while these were more flexible than the standards set by the military, everyone here was also in the process of finding the place they belonged within the current structure.

The division of labor took shape naturally, and a lenient hierarchy of superiors and subordinates just kind of happened. Even Slugger Law seemed to be taking his work seriously, maintaining the Machining Skins and cleaning up the plastic dinnerware after a meal on his own accord.

Subayashi Hayato couldn’t take it.

He wondered where the unabashed selfishness displayed by everyone on this ship had gone.

He much preferred the old status quo of a warship, where there was no priority on respect for the individual instead of this friendly atmosphere.

If you’re going to be domesticated by one another then don’t bite at the start.

That was Hayato's frustration.

It was the same when it came to the superhuman named A-Bao.

Everyone else here detested him too. The children's fear of him bordered on disgust.

However, the crew's attitude had completely shifted after he went missing.

No one mentioned A-Bao by name, but everyone was thinking about him. The heavy air filling the ship gave that away.

A half-year since they started. During that time many people had died on this ship. People that were kind, and people that weren't. People that were close, and people that were distant. Soldiers. Civilians. People who met their end in spectacular fashion, and people who had died with no one else to bear witness. The cycle of various deaths continued to repeat itself aboard the *Pegasus*.

Which brought the living to where they were now. There was a feeling of comradery between the crew that could only be shared by survivors.

However, no one held any such feelings for A-Bao. Why was that?

Because he was an irregular.

A different species than the rest of them.

That's why they rejected him, denied him.

That's why they despised him, loathed him.

But ever since A-Bao, who they hated because he was different, vanished, they had experienced the terror of combat multiple times. While it was selfish, they realized that up until now A-Bao had always been there to save them, and their feelings about him quickly flipped.

They could be laughing or they could be working, but it seemed that there was always something else on the minds of the crew members.

It would have made more sense to Hayato if A-Bao had left and no one changed. He couldn't understand the one-sided attitude of worrying about someone who you had hated this whole time, just because you came to the realization that they were necessary.

That's why you should keep on hating him, just like I've been doing from the very beginning.

With that thought he unconsciously gritted his teeth.

"Hey, have you ever noticed this about yourself?"

They were in the middle of maintenance and Koo "YC" Deng, a pilot candidate like Hayato, spoke up.

"Normally you're so emotionless that it's hard to tell if you're even alive or not, but when the subject is A-Bao you get worked up to this level that none of us are asking for."

Hayato felt an icy chill spreading across his cheeks.

"Koo, why don't you handle the work on my machine this time? It's a chance for you to falsify the personal data in the memory. You do that, and then you'll really be able to see me get angry."

“I wonder. Isn’t A-Bao surprisingly blameless here? Man, your feelings about him are something else entirely. Like I know I’m no match for A-Bao. Even if I slept with Frau behind his back.”

In an instant, Hayato, his body shaped by years of judo, had his hands around Koo’s neck.

His blood boiling, Hayato’s anger moved his body forward on reflex. The sound of a crash echoed through the maintenance hangar.

“How about I kill you?” Hayato growled.

However, Koo didn’t flinch.

“See, there’s nothing else I could say that would make you go that far.” Koo’s expression hadn’t changed. “If you get it then let go of me already.”

Hayato clicked his tongue, frustrated that he had been so easy to read. Even that kind of display of emotion was unusual for him. It was hard to meet Koo’s gaze, who was currently looking at him with an expression of ‘see, that’s what I mean.’

“Stop acting like a priest just because you’re Christian.” Hayato spun on his heel, back to the cockpit of his Gunboy Orville to continue with his maintenance work.

It was there that he was interrupted by a man who had watched the entire scene play out from the hangar deck.

“What, the show’s over already? There’s nothing else to do on this ship for fun, fights are the best entertainment we can get. Come on, give me a little more.”

Slugger Law.

The *Pegasus* had recently received two new Gravity models of Machining Skin, and Slugger had eventually been assigned one after showing that he could pilot, despite being an amateur. He even looked right at home in a maintenance uniform, giving off the impression that he had worn one before.

“You want to suck on that German chick’s tits so bad, huh Hayato?”

Holding a drink in one hand, Slugger looked over the pair and smirked obnoxiously. He had no reason to tease or to be teased. He was just bored.

Hayato knew that, and didn’t take the bait. That had been the plan, anyway.

“Or is it about that, is it A-Bao? You miss that nut job that much?”

Just that name was all it took for Hayato to see red.

“The pet dog sure is yapping a lot today.” He spat out the words.

“Hayato, you son of a bitch!” Slugger roared.

“That’s right, just like that. I can’t stand it when you’re pretending to be a decent person.”

“Hayato, that’s enough! I was at fault too.”

However, before Koo could intervene Hayato had already pushed himself off the ground.

“Hayato stop!” Koo shouted, but his words didn’t reach either of them. Hayato was floating in zero-g, on a direct course for Slugger.

“Fastball, right down the middle! That’s not the kind of pitch you should be throwing me!” Slugger grabbed the incoming Hayato and swung a muscular arm towards his face.

“Hayato!” Koo’s voice echoed through the hangar.

But Hayato dodged Slugger’s powerful arm at the last possible moment, grabbing him by the collar with both hands and then reversing his position in midair, using the strength of Slugger’s punch to his advantage.

“Hah!” The chi stored inside him was expelled outward.

“Wha–?” Slugger opened his mouth, but it was too late. He had realized that his body was already airborne. The giant man crashed into the floor, his blonde hair a mess.

An Ippon-Seoi-Nage, performed brilliantly in zero gravity.

“Geez–alright, hang on!” Koo launched himself off the ground in order to rescue Hayato, who had been sent flying up towards the ceiling as the opposite reaction to throwing Slugger. “Good grief…what are you doing, you idiot…”

As he floated, Hayato shouted at Slugger. “You’ll never beat me if all you got is raw strength!” Knocking aside Koo’s outstretched hand he kicked off the ceiling, heading down to the corridor on his own. That was how he normally was, stubbornly trying to live without accepting help from anyone else.

“Still, it’s just like you to belittle and pick fights with someone like that.”

Even with that said, the injury to Slugger’s pride meant that he had to up the ante.

Ever since A-Bao had vanished no one had brought up the matter directly, and the equilibrium of the ship, kept intact only through silence, was beginning to break down. Even if they were comrades with the shared goal of survival, at the end of the day it was still a disjointed ship made up of people who lived for nothing but their own egotistical reasons. It would have been more bizarre if they had been able to maintain a sense of trust and friendship.

Slugger was thinking. When it came down to it a person just couldn't change, he concluded bitterly.

I hated him. I hated A-Bao. He robbed me of baseball, of my girl, of my cushy life. I despised him from the bottom of my heart. So much that even if I killed him a million times over it wouldn't free me from this curse. Nevertheless, I couldn't kill him.

I found out about his despair. I ended up learning what that 17-year-old shoulders. The sorrow of a man who knows when he'll die, who knows that he's a mutant fated never to associate with humans.

So Slugger thought.

"…I thought that I had managed to become a little bit more human, but in the end, things always turn out this way." He quietly drew his gun.

Chapter 15 “Casval Bailey—The New Breed”

Slugger quietly drew his pistol.

“…I thought that I had managed to become a little bit more human, but in the end, things always turn out this way.”

It was a thought at the very back of his mind. Not regret—it was something akin to “frustration” in himself.

Slugger believed that this ship had allowed him to become just a bit more human.

However, people don’t change so easily. In the end, Slugger hadn’t changed either. No, perhaps he might have, if things had only gone on like this for a little longer.

However, he had drawn his weapon before that change could take place.

A gun couldn’t simply be put away once it had been brought out. You put yourself at risk of being shot yourself, and even if you didn’t fire the gun it would never erase the fact that you had still drawn it. The act of aiming a gun at a crew member he lived with would leave an indelible scar on both of them.

That alone made it impossible to go back to the past.

“Slugger…just put the gun down.”

Koo spoke as he floated in the air. Even though he was nervous to see the barrel of the pistol turn to him, Koo wanted to prevent Slugger from pulling the trigger. By no means had Koo ever hated Slugger. Wicked actions and a wicked mind are two different things. People condemned Slugger for his immorality, but Koo didn't think that his mind itself was immoral. He just thought that the man was crude.

Just being a crude person wouldn't cause Koo to hate you. That was clear from the look in his eyes. Knowing that only made things harder for Slugger. But there was no going back now.

But…if he could, this would be his final chance—

Koo's eyes reflected the days they had spent here. Slugger's mind relaxed. The muzzle of the gun angled slightly downward. Yes, just like that. Please just keep lowering the gun, Koo prayed fervently.

It didn't go unnoticed by Hayato. He saw that Slugger was gradually losing the desire to fight.

"Hyah!"

Hayato threw the spanner hanging from his waist at Slugger, and then pushed Koo with all of his strength back and to the left. Airborne, he threw himself forward and to the right.

"Hayato!" Koo screamed.

"Fucker!!!" Slugger bellowed.

Hayato's spanner reignited Slugger's smoldering fuse. He squeezed the trigger. The sharp thunderclap of a gunshot—and another. An empty casing skipped off

the ground. There was a metallic ringing. One of the bullets grazed Hayato's left thigh.

"Argh-"

Hayato stifled a scream, but the sound still leaked from his mouth. His face was contorted in pain—full of hatred. His blood pooled and turned spherical as it polluted the air. It floated around him, like it was trying to swallow him up.

"You…God-damn idiot…"

Covered in the smell of gunpowder and smoke, Koo's words pierced through Slugger's heart. There was no going back. Someone had heard the sound of gunfire and pulled the alarm. The area was drowned out by the sirens. Slugger turned and ran.

"Maintenance, what's going on down there!? Answer me!"

An image of the bridge appeared on the comms monitor by the deck—it was Marker. Slugger aimed his gun at the screen and pulled the trigger. It wasn't out of anger. It was sorrowful. He couldn't stand seeing the faces of the crew.

People hurried to the maintenance hangar. But before they could get there—

Cold, weightless space—sweat was pouring from his body. Slugger ran. Standing in front of him was their new model of Machining Skin—the Gravity. The machine that Slugger had worked so hard on to set up and maintain. The cockpit hatch—already open. Main power—still running. Get inside and get out of here. You can't go back anymore.

"Somebody stop Slugger! Grab hold of Hayato!"

Koo continued to yell, annoyed that he was still free floating and unable to steer his body. Hayato was making a beeline for the deck as he fought through the intense pain. He was still bleeding uncontrollably from his leg. There were a growing number of reddish-black balls of blood floating through space. His face was becoming paler as they increased. A chill would eventually start to take over his body. Koo needed to help Hayato before that happened. He also needed to stop Slugger. Trying to rid himself of his frustration, he continued to shout.

“Koo, what’s wrong!? Are we under attack!?”

Hachijo Shima and Ram Dowai came running as soon as they heard the gunshots—they still didn’t know what had transpired.

“H-Hayato!!!”

Shima screamed at the floating blood. A look at the wounded Hayato and she understood. A look at Slugger, running away with a gun in his hand, and she understood.

“Slugger, no, how could you…”

Slugger already had a place in Shima’s heart. She hadn’t confessed her feelings to him. That was why she didn’t want to believe what she was seeing. Just thinking about it made her chest ache.

Ram Dowai, who had grown up with Shima and was something of an older brother to her, had guessed her thoughts already.

“Shima, get Hayato and take him to the infirmary right away. I’ll handle Slugger. Bright, are you listening? It’s me. Slugger shot Hayato. Koo’s still stuck in the air. I have no idea what’s about to happen next. Send someone to come get him down.”

Ram hollered into the nearby monitor.

“Understood. I’m on my way.”

The video feed was off, with only the audio coming through. After a brief pause the display turned on. It was Bright’s private quarters—he was naked, pulling on a shirt. Ram could see the outline of a woman behind him.

“Mirai…? No, Sayla!?”

Without thinking he punched the screen.

“Even though we’re just about to dock at Palda Bay!”

At that moment, there was another gunshot.

“Eeek!!!”

Shima screamed—it was a feminine voice, unsuited to her masculine character. Ram quickly moved to cover her, shielding her with his entire body.

The shot had come from the direction of the Gravity that Slugger was headed towards. Gun smoke—and a large quantity of floating blood. A large body went flying out of the cockpit it had been trying to enter—the person shot was Slugger himself.

“Who was that!? Who fired that shot!?”

Koo yelled. Panting, he looked around frantically.

Shima had the answer.

“T-that boy…”

Even Koo could see the figure inside the cockpit, his gun still raised. He was wearing overalls and a green winter half-coat. The skin revealed through the gaps of his outfit was dark—and smooth.

“If someone points a gun at you, you gotta shoot ’em right away. Don’t shoot and you’ll get shot. Just like this.”

Eyes radiating a powerful light, full of vitality. Fluttering, silver hair.

Casval Bailey.

The boy A-Bao had found inside the *Texas* colony.

A second shot. Slugger screamed in agony. There was blood everywhere.

“Casval, stop it! That’s enough, stop!!!”

Koo had finally made his way to the wall, and as he kicked off it he shouted towards the Gravity. Casval should have been able to hear him. However, he kept his gun pointed at Slugger. His eyes were eloquent, and they did all the talking. I’m really going to kill you, they said.

“Casval, that’s enough. No more.”

The reality of these irrevocable events weighed heavily on Koo. The tone of his voice darkened, as if covered by shadow.

“Why? He was trying to go AWOL. He was even gonna take a Machining Skin with him. Making off with other people’s stuff is an act that deserves death, in my book. Let me kill him. He’s in the way. We don’t need him.”

“You…fucking…brat…”

Slugger groans. Glaring at Casval, his hand pressed to his shoulder in an attempt to stop the bleeding, he forces himself to move, even as his entire body screams in pain. He searches around for the pistol that got knocked from his hand.

“…I’m going to rip you apart…”

“Slugger, knock it off!”

Ram Dowai seized hold of him.

“They aren’t fatal wounds, but if we don’t stop the bleeding we’ll be swimming in a sea of blood. Koo, I’ll carry Slugger. You deal with Casval.”

“Casval…what were you even doing in the Gravity’s cockpit?”

In response to Koo’s question, Casval’s face was brimming with confidence. Innocent—worry-free.

“I knew all about it. From way back, see. I even knew that I was going to be on this ship. I knew that baseball-brained ape was going to steal this Machining Skin and try to run. How do I put it…a flash? I could see it, perfectly clear. That’s why I hid myself. I was waiting for him to arrive. Turns out I was right, yeah? If not for me, not only would he have escaped, he might’ve even blown up the ship on his way out.”

The surroundings were stained with blood. An enormous quantity continued to hang in the air. Casval spoke from its epicenter.

Koo remembered something.

A-Bao had been searching for a tiny light. Was it a hopeful light? Or was it one that would bring destruction? Even A-Bao hadn't been sure. He only knew that the light was necessary. Koo didn't understand the things that A-Bao talked about. However, in the *Texas* colony A-Bao had told him that it was something that pointed to a person.

"Forecast…"

Koo muttered to himself. The power to see the future. A-Bao's power. And now, there was another person with that same power right in front of him. However, unlike A-Bao, who had struggled to come to grips with his unique abilities as they caused him nothing but suffering, this person was the exact opposite. He seemed to have been completely assimilated by them instead.

They were almost to the port now.

Koo was unable to contain the feeling of rejection toward Casval that welled up from the back of his mind.

-Slugger Law
A former Major Leaguer who achieved some success as a "slugger." His player evaluation wasn't the highest, but it was by no means bad, and people expected that he would do well with his innate talent and athleticism. The person who turned Slugger into such an abject failure in life was A-Bao. Slugger hates A-Bao from the depths of his soul, but at the same time he knows of A-Bao's sorrow and despair, and he chooses to board the *Pegasus*.

-Subayashi Hayato
Hayato was raised to be the successor of the Subayashi Judo School. He was weak from birth and an introverted person, but his strict father trained him from an early age, never spoiling him in the slightest. Of course, this had a big impact

on the development of his personality, as Hayato grew up unconsciously confusing “enduring” with “never revealing your feelings.” Yes, right up until he met A-Bao…

Chapter 16 “Casval Bailey—The New Breed 2”

The Shocking Appearance of the True Protagonist! The Near Future Science Fiction Novel is Reaching its Conclusion!

Born on the Earth, Casval Bailey had grown up an orphan. Although he came from the Caribbean there was nothing more concrete regarding his birthplace or parents publicly, and after some time wandering he left for space by himself when he was still very young. Of course, this didn’t happen through the proper channels. He was finally successful on his third attempt stowing away on a spaceship, and he made it to outer space.

“Once I left the islands I was treated like an outsider no matter where I went, so I figured that maybe there’d be more freedom up in space. Seems like the chances of striking it rich would be a lot better compared to the Earth too. But, y’know, I didn’t have a ticket or passport or cash or anything, so I had to slip in

with the cargo. I sure paid for it when we broke through the atmosphere. There was nothing comfy about being in that hold, it was the first time in my life I ever prayed to God. I said hey God, not once from the time I was born did I ever think you were actually out there, but if you'll spare just me I'll let you have the whole rotten Earth."

After that he met A-Bao in the *Texas* colony, where the drifting *Pegasus* had made anchor, and he asked to be taken along.

"I was able to adapt to my new environment right away. I did have some space sickness, but I got over it quickly. Maybe 'cuz I'd been skin diving ever since I was a kid? It wasn't long before no one would have ever suspected I came from Earth. After hopping from ship to ship I arrived at the *Texas* colony. There were only so many places I could go, since I didn't even have any identification. That was the reason I ended up in an abandoned colony like *Texas*. But really, there was another reason I came here. The *Pegasus*. I'd been thinking about it for a long time. If I went to *Texas*, that white battleship would arrive. And I'd be able to get on it."

There was another youth beside Casval. A smartly dressed, androgynous-looking boy. His name was Leroy Gilliam.

"I met Leroy before coming to *Texas*. He had a good upbringing, unlike me, going to a school where everyone was upper class, and from time to time I'd see him out on the lawn, painting pictures and stuff. I had nothing else to do so I'd make fun of him. Sayin' like, young sir, what a wonderful hobby you have! Does doing that kind of thing earn you a delicious supper? And get this, he replies with,

"It's because people don't have hobbies that they become degenerates." What do you think my reaction to that was, huh? You bet I bashed his face in! After that we became friends. So when I decided that I was going to *Texas* and snuck

onto that patrol ship, he tagged along. This guy actually ran away from his dorm, a place that feeds you and gives you a place to sleep!’”’

Once in *Texas*, the two of them repaired a broken down machining worker, and kept practicing until they were able to pilot it.

“You ‘av’ta be able to operate a worker at least, or you’ll never survive in this era. I had a little experience before, but it wasn’t until *Texas* that I really got to learn. And now I can use one better than I can a fork and knife.”

Casval told Leroy about the Earth. About places with a sky, and wind, and water and sun. About how the gap between the rich and the poor was so extreme that people had lost the will to live, sealing themselves away inside capsules to continue their deep slumber.

“He painted a picture after hearing me talk about the sea. I was surprised. Maybe it’s ‘cuz he’s never seen it for himself, but even though the only seas I know are filthy and polluted, every bit of the sea he made was beautiful.”

When Casval said he wanted to board the *Pegasus*, Leroy protested.

“*Texas* will always be *Texas*, it’s not a decent place to live. But even so, it was fun there. We had an entire colony to ourselves, to play around however we liked. But it was only good at the start. There’s almost no food or water, and worst of all the air’s bad. Bad, and thin. That’s why Leroy wanted to go back to his school. I didn’t really care where we went, but I’d had enough of *Texas*. I had too much power, too much of myself. It was more than I could handle. I was going to explode if I stayed in a place like that. So I thought, I want to fight. Fight, and let it all out.

So when the *Pegasus* showed up I was determined to get onto that ship no matter what it took. After all, they could fight. But Leroy didn’t want to do that either. He doesn’t like fighting much.”

So the *Pegasus* sent Leroy back to his colony and his dorm, his destiny yet unrealized, and Casval remained aboard the ship.

The members of the crew received Casval amicably, but obviously each person had their private feelings on the matter.

Some were happy to get some rare stimulus in a dull ship life filled with routine tasks, while others were irritated at the need to recalculate the amount of basic consumption now that the number of people had increased. At any rate, everyone agreed that this would help to make up for the overwhelming shortage in manpower they faced.

However, after hearing the stories Casval told from before he arrived on the ship, the attitudes of the crew changed drastically. In the mess hall, as Casval spoke they would get up, one by one, and leave their seats without a word.

They didn't go as far as blaming A-Bao, the person who had brought him aboard, but they made sure to distance themselves from the egotistical Casval, eager to fight anyone and everyone.

Every single member of the crew was exhausted from this long voyage. They thought of it as something that they had just gotten pulled into, and from the bottom of their hearts they wanted to get away from this conflict as soon as they could.

In their eyes, Casval was nothing but a self-centered child who didn't understand a thing.

However, there were those aboard influenced by Casval. Two young boys—Fu Sing Letz and Fu Sing Katz. They hung onto every word he said as the truth, and then one day he told them, "You're men too, you're no good if you can't fight. At the very least you need to be able to save everyone else, or they'll throw you off the ship."

So with that instigation the pair ended up sneaking into the cockpit of a Machining Skin. Koo and Hayato were on maintenance duty and put a stop to everything before it could turn into a major problem, but Slugger was furious. Partially because the Machining Skin in question was the Gravity that he maintained, but mostly because of Casval's response.

"I just thought those two kids would do a better job at fighting than some baseball player addicted to burgers and coke."

Slugger raised his fists. He hit Casval repeatedly, holding nothing back. Frau Bohr, Hachijo Shima and Oscar Dublin were all present when it happened, but no one attempted to intervene because all of them had already been insulted by Casval in some way.

Of course, Koo's straight-laced nature wouldn't allow him to stay uninvolved, and while everyone would criticize him for it afterwards, it wasn't until he was tending to Casval's bloated face that he started to understand Frau and the others' feelings.

"I screwed up. If I knew I was coming aboard this kind of ship it would have been better just to stay in *Texas*. The food sucks, no one ever shuts up, to call it a complete disappointment would be an understatement. It's a wonder you all managed to stay alive this long. I guess your enemies must have been even weaker. Hey, you know about this? When I was going from colony to colony, I heard there's a place on Earth called India that has over *33 million gods*, and one of them, the one that breaks things, is reeeal popular with the regular people. I didn't believe in God and stuff, but after hearing that story I thought, hey, maybe God's not so bad. That's why ever since then I decided that my god would be the one that breaks things. That's right, the God of Destruction. Do you know what that god is telling me to do right now?"

When Koo said that no, he didn't, Casval closed his swollen eyelids, folded his hands in prayer and spoke cheerfully.

"Punish that baseball player with lead."

That sneering face would stay burned into Koo's memory for quite some time.

Koo wanted to know why this boy had been invited aboard. But just as he was about to ask, A-Bao disappeared along with Wilbur during a sortie.

And then came the incident in the maintenance room.

A petty fight between Hayato and Slugger. It was no excuse for Slugger to fire a gun at Hayato, and punishment would be inescapable. Of course, that was only if the *Pegasus* had been a proper ship. Nevertheless, the fact that he had used a gun against an ally couldn't be waved away. The rift created between him and the rest of the crew was insurmountable.

However, Slugger had also been seriously injured.

Ram Dowai had taken the wounded Slugger to the sickbay where he had received treatment. It was fortunate that Hayato's injuries weren't particularly severe, but it was a different story with Slugger.

Slugger had been shot twice. Once in the shoulder and once in the side. The amount of blood lost from the gunshot in his side had been particularly bad.

The shooter was Casval. A punishment of lead—those were the words that appeared in the back of Koo's mind.

Unfortunately, their supply of sedatives had run out, leaving Slugger with no other choice but to bear with the pain.

That shitty brat, I'll never forgive him for this. I'll kill him myself. I'll kill him. I'll fucking kill him.

Every time he heard the curses, Koo felt like he was being played for a fool.

Casval had said it.

"I knew all about it. From way back, see. I even knew that I was going to be on this ship. How do I put it…a flash? I can see it, perfectly clear."

It was possible that Casval had the same ability to see the future that A-Bao did, Koo thought. However, it appeared to Koo like Casval had been seduced by that power. The exact opposite of A-Bao, who struggled to come to grips with his abilities as he agonized over them—there was something about it that Koo found reprehensible.

With each invective, the sense of rejection towards Casval that had begun to sprout up in the corner of his mind grew stronger, gnawing away at him. For Koo, who had always strived to live as an exemplary Christian, at least in spirit, this was a first.

Feeling that Slugger's curses would spread through his entire body if he stayed there alone, Koo exited the sickbay and made his way to the bridge. It was there that he heard the news.

The normally stoic Marker was grinning. In his chair, Bright was smiling too. Koo felt as if Slugger's curses and the negative feelings spreading through his heart were melting away.

"Koo, we just received a transmission from Barrel 6. A-Bao survived. It sounds like he's at the consulate. We haven't spoken with him directly yet, but we have confirmation that he's alive." A wave of relief washed over the crew. All except for one person.

The Finale, Chapter 17 “Ling A-Bao…The Forecast“

As mankind seized control of the universe, the era that viewed expansion into space as a symbol of a bright future was already fading into the past. With that said, space travel was only something for the wealthy, and space during this time was nothing more than an upscale theme park where the rich could spend enormous amounts of money and enjoy the feeling of superiority. In other words, the symbol of the future was turning into the symbol of wealth. However, as expansion continued and forced migration began, to a place without air or water, it lost that association with luxury.

“The people staying behind on Earth are the politicians and the ones funding their lifestyles.” The first generation migrants would point to the irony of switching positions with the rich.

The Earth had become a haven for the aristocracy. And in contrast, outer space, still under development, was a harsh environment. The difficulty of life in space far exceeded the expectations of those forced to move there.

It’s not a place meant for people to live—the number of people proclaiming that was diminishing as well. In addition to the hard labor associated with space development, the inconveniences of day-to-day life and the lack of personal freedom were clearly taking a toll on the minds and bodies of the immigrants.

However, those living on Earth looked down on the space colonies as places of filthy air and water. It wasn’t long before anti-Earth sentiment had started to take root in the migrant population. And as the poor working conditions for the laborers building the space colonies fomented antipathy towards the Earth, it

also strengthened the sense of solidarity amongst the space immigrants. Nowhere was this felt as strongly as Barrel 3, the oldest of the sides used for immigration purposes. It was nearly fifty years after moving to Side 3 that the Anti-Earth Union Group, who had adopted Zeon Deikun's Future Human Theory of Streamers as their ideology and advocated for independence and self-reliance, in addition to carrying out small scale resistance activities, would be approached by the non-Federation members of the Earth Assembly with an offer of military support.

The Earth—

The two men were in a remote corner of Taiwan.

"Who'd have ever thought I'd have a son at my age. Unlike you, I still have much to learn."

On a small riverboat, the old man drank wine. He didn't seem discontent.

"I'm no match for you, Master."

A gentleman sat across from him. His suit seemed at odds with the half-naked old man, but neither of them seemed to care.

"What did you name him?"

"Hm. What name would you choose?"

"Well then…Ling."

"Ling. That's a nice name. Alright, let's call him Ling."

"Master, is that really okay?"

“It’s fine, it’s fine. It’s more modern for you to name him than me.” He looked quite pleased. “Now then.” The old man set down the bowl he had been drinking from. “Hey, Yashima.”

“What is it, Master?”

“Will you take care of my son?”

The man named Yashima did not ask for a reason. Asking wouldn’t have changed his response.

“Yes.” That was it.

“You’ve become a fine man, Yashima.” The old man raised his head. The skies were clear. The old man dreamt of the outer space that lay beyond the clouds. “Well, I’ll leave things to you.”

“What about you, Master?” That question was all Yashima could manage.

“I might be a little longer this time. Just some old business I need to take care of.” Gazing down at the face of his sleeping son beside him, the old man’s expression looked incredibly sad.

It was more than enough to say that this was goodbye.

“Forgive me for burdening you with such a painful fate. Please try to stay alive. I’ll be going on ahead, as your father.” Saying that, he closed his eyes.

Yashima wept, unable to speak.

On that night, Zeon Deikun was assassinated.

That was 17 years ago.

That baby had grown up, and was sitting in a new model of Machining Skin—the G3, aka "Ghost," a replacement for the destroyed Gunboy Wilbur. Even as history and people toyed with his destiny, the young man rose from a pilot candidate into an ace pilot, and alone he listened to the stirring of a new era.

After their reunion with A-Bao, the crew of the *Pegasus* was once again headed into the line of fire. As the enemy attacks became more intense with each passing day, there were also many people that viewed their continued survival as a threat.

The Anti-Earth Union Group had expanded in scale, thanks to the generous backing of the Packdelia Foundation, and it accumulated supporters across space. There were even people saying that the Earth Federation, paralyzed by peace and accustomed to indolence, was no longer capable of opposing them.

The AEUG was scared of the *Pegasus*, but one battleship alone wouldn't be able to prolong the war forever. The damage to the Earth Federation as a whole would naturally end up hurting the *Pegasus* as well.

Forced into isolation and self-reliance on the front lines, the crew of the *Pegasus* was only becoming more and more irate with the Earth Federation. Amidst this, the boy ace thinks.

When a person dies, they return to ashes; when a person dies, their thoughts return to the void. The darkness is erased by light, but so is the light erased by darkness.

That definitely isn't something caused by hopelessness. That's why I want to stay strong.

That's what he thought.

Of all the myriad types of people, when it came to the predetermined program known as "Death," they didn't fight against it, but lived with it. That was the sole startup item installed in everyone. The powerful determination in the boy's eyes was a reflection of this. And yet, the reason he was in the dark, clutching his knees, was because there was something conflicting with that determination. The contradiction between dissent and determination—it was all because the red-haired boy named Ling A-Bao was still just a boy.

The boy recoils incredulously at the words of the onlookers who say that the battlefield shouldn't be a pleasant place to be.

It was the product of self-justification, from an existence that never knew any other method of keeping his spirits unencumbered than whole-hearted self-assurance. It was why he was still a boy, and in other words, it wasn't at all a value unique to the one named A-Bao.

However, he is still too immature and disordered to affirm that, or even something like it, and is held back by a swamp of unpleasant feelings. Such words, wielded by the onlookers as a last resort against the boy, are all they have, both in the past and the future, and so that attack has already faded and lost its edge. The requests to transform into adulthood have been mass-produced, making them no more effective than a dull blade, and the boy rejects these too. Rejection and self-affirmation.

This again is because of his nature, and it goes back to what makes him a boy. However, the boy has a name: A-Bao. It remains so, even if what he sees in the mirror is a pale face deeply contorted by displeasure.

This battlefield feels good to him.

Swirling inside the vacuum, the explosive light steadily increased in mass—to A-Bao it looked like the giant ring of light was blooming.

And he realized.

Hayato had come under fire from an enemy Machining Skin, and he'd been killed.

"If this is fate, it's just as well. Right, Hayato?"

The Ghost's cockpit system was outfitted with bleeding-edge equipment to respond to A-Bao's Streamer abilities, and it quickly processed Hayato's death, furiously synchronizing with its pilot. With his suit locked into the lower section of his seat, A-Bao steered the Machining Skin with a snap of his hips and the Ghost reoriented itself, racing away from Hayato's starburst.

"This thing sure moves! Doesn't it, Dad!" He had completely forgotten about the dilemma of piloting the machine that his father had designed. At this moment, he was even happy to have the connection.

"Born in a forgettable corner of Taiwan, he was a child possessing innate extrasensory powers. He was placed under the care of the Yashima zaibatsu, but circumstances led to us at the Packdelia Foundation taking custody of him. His background, and his memories were erased. The initial experiments were completed on Earth, using the Foundation's research facilities."

His abilities were unstable and weakening, and so the Packdelia Foundation and Flanagan's laboratory enhanced him artificially. In doing so, most of his memories were wiped and reconstructed, and over half of what he remembers is falsified.

His ability, “Forecast,” is nothing more than an image of the future created by human hands and implanted within him.

He was lauded as an ace pilot of a deadly weapon, sometimes persecuted as a psychic, and he saw and experienced much more than other people. That’s why he’s survived this far, with the intention of passing everything on. Himself—and his thoughts, which would never be fulfilled. He had seen his death, and he was prepared to face it without flinching. However, he was still only 17 years old. A depressed and twisted boy seeking love through human interaction.

“This is really going to shake up this abnormal order.”

“The way the world goes from here is going to be up to me, although it’s still nothing more than the opportunity that’s been provided.”

He was just a boy, who believed that even those contradictions were the truth.

And now, the moment of his death was close at hand. Prepared, he didn’t look away, but pushed the pedals down even further.

“Humans have emotions deep under the surface, ones that they normally don’t use. It’s hard to get there on your own. But it’s also true that there are plenty of people who reach that place without thinking, and it takes a good deal of willpower for them to climb back out.

The fact is that a lot of them don’t. Are you someone who will get there yourself? Or are you going to step into it thoughtlessly? Tell me, which one are you?”

A-Bao felt like he was now able to answer the question that Slugger Law once asked him.

“Thoughtless or not, my positive emotions, my negative emotions, my successes and failures and loneliness, it’s all mine. I won’t hand them over to anyone. The sea of self-loathing and the sea of narcissism, I’ll drink them all up by myself!”

It was a place where only those who could think like that would be permitted to stay. *That’s why the battlefield felt good. If I could come back, this would be a nice place to come back to.*

With that wish in mind, A-Bao died.

A beam fired by an enemy D.D. Machining Skin hit the Ghost squarely. That was the final moment of the 17-year-old boy at the hands of Leeroy Gilliam.

Not long after that, Mirai Eyland-Yashima entrusted all of her life force to his G3, developed using the best of bioengineering (bionics) and mechanical engineering, and which was powered by human energy; a true realization of Flanagan’s ideals.

She lost her life protecting the *Pegasus*. The crew was scattered after its destruction by the AEUG’s Beam Attack A-Bao warned them of yet they had protected them from.

Bright Noah, who fell in love with the AEUG esper Kuzco Al, would end up killing her with his own hands. It killed his heart as well, swearing never again could he trust the enemy, and thus he became a zealous *demon* for the Federation.

Koo “YC” Deng stayed in space, and later joined together with Packdelia. He helped raise the banner of a new spacenoid empire based around the Anti-Earth Union Group, lending his efforts to space independence.

Sayla Mass contracted space radiation sickness as a consequence of her sorties, and the light in her eyes disappeared in blindness. Never did she learn Casval

Bailey to be the son of her brother, Casval Deikum, and Lalah Sung. Her whereabouts after that, and the War, are unknown.

Ram Dowai returned to the Earth together with Slugger, with Hachijo Shima following suit. Once back, they momentarily parted ways, Ram promising Slugger that they'd meet again in a few days' time. That was the last time he saw Slugger alive.

Abnormal didn't even begin to describe the state of Slugger's corpse. The right arm that he had been so proud of was plunged through his own heart. It was impossible to believe that it could have been the work of another human being. But, it wouldn't have been impossible for a Streamer.

The death of the awakened one in space—following that, Streamers were placed under strict military surveillance. However, someone who slipped through the net had his mind affected by his own rampant power. Ram remembered Casval Bailey, the boy A-Bao had found.

"That shitty brat, I'll never forgive him for this. I'll kill him myself."

When he had been shot, Slugger cursed Casval over and over, his face warped in pain. It only made Casval detest him more.

♦

After awakening as a Streamer, Casval too helped Koo to form the new empire for a time, but Bailey's brutal nature led to his expulsion, and nobody knew where he had disappeared off to after that.

Knowing of his own death, A-Bao had already prepared himself to die without hesitation. That's why he intended to pass on everything. He would entrust his thoughts, that which he wasn't able to complete himself, to the next generation. To the Gene-Divers, To Casval.

“Pay close attention everybody! Everyone on this battlefield! Everyone in this region! That includes that boy as well!”

However, those thoughts were not carried on. Casval too was still a “boy,” filled with selfish rejection and self-affirmation.

After everything, even a hand in his passing due to his connection to Leeroy, Casval didn’t even know.

What did A-Bao wish to achieve…?

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Thank you for your readership over these two years. -The Entire Staff

(End)

GLOSSARY

-Earth Federation Forces Use Machining Skin Pilot Helmet

EARTH FEDERATION FORCES USE
MACHINING SKIN PILOT HELMET
The new model of helmet, making its consecutive appearance. Thinking that the helmets of recent anime weren't particularly exciting, Ohtsuka reworked the old version of the helmet into a rough sketch, which Koyama cleaned up. We think that we've created an interesting, near future design. Speaking of the bird shape, the originator of that would be Tatsunoko. On this occasion, we took another look at their designs and found them to be quite eccentric and fascinating. (tangent continues)
PILOT USE
(Continued) "Lightning Speed Volter", the hero of the Playstation game Tatsunoko Fight, which came out a couple of years ago, has an incredible shape to his helmet. Anyone curious should definitely check it out. (tangent still continues...)
SUB PILOT USE
(Continued) By the way, Volter was designed by Roberto Ferrari, an Italian. He was so moved watching Tatsunoko's anime in Italy that he ended up coming to Japan. (tangent concludes)
"SLUGGER" LAW USE
The more showy this kind of paint job, the more it flourishes! With that in mind, Slugger's helmet has eyes! It's certainly cool, but wearing it must make the entire outfit look...pretty idiotic. It's on the level of Party7's Captain Banana.
CASVAL BAILEY USE
Casval's helmet uses a calming color scheme, contrasting Slugger's. I wonder when he'll be able to wear it... We're looking forward to seeing him in a pilot suit soon and showing what he can do.
TRAINING USE
No one's allowed to make any comments like "Huh, isn't that like Unit-00?" (It also looks like a GM Trainer, doesn't it.) All of the color variants on this page were drawn by Koyama in Illustrator, using Bezier curves.
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「MOBILSUIT GUNDAM ❶~❽」(Kadokawa Shoten)
BARREL
바렐
195 Newtype

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-Pilot Use

(Continued) "Lightning Speed Volter", hero of the PlayStation game *Tatsunoko Fight*, which came out a couple of years ago, has an incredible shape to his helmet. Anyone curious should definitely check it out. (tangent still continues…)

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-Practice Use

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-Kuzco Al

Number 2 in the Original Four. Of the group, she has most experience with Machining Skin combat, but she avoids piloting them due to an awareness of her future where, "If I get inside of a Machining Skin for a third time I'll die." Of the Original Four she's the closest to being a normal person, but as a result she lacks specialized skills, and is completely obedient to Lalah Sung due to an absolute fear of her. She has no sense of taste, and a strong masochistic streak. She occasionally experiences infantile regression stemming from a mental imbalance. Her machine is the L-MESS 2.

-"Slugger" Law (Pilot Suit)

What a lovely shade of blue. You wouldn't think that Slugger would have such a bright color for his pilot suit. This isn't something he had specially ordered either. When he saw that it had gotten mixed in with the other supplies for some reason, he went, "Doesn't this one look cool? I'll take it!" and snatched it up. Although, in reality the distribution of supplies in the military isn't so careless. By the way, the designer Koyama said that because Slugger's eyes stay hidden by his bangs, "his helmet has the eyes instead."

-Koo “YC” Deng (Pilot Suit)

Chinese. His parents are devout Christians. Koo Deng is his real name; the “YC” is an abbreviation of his Christian middle name [Ya-cow, or Jacob]. Like Ling A-Bao and Subayashi Hayato he’s a Machining Skin pilot candidate with the rank of Chief Petty Officer. He pilots a Gunboy Orville (ID code C109), and his skills are first rate. Despite his looks he’s the leader of the group of pilot candidates and has a considerate, brotherly type of personality. The war orphan Kitamoto Kikka idolizes him. The helmet she’s wearing belongs to Slugger, who will probably be quite angry to find that his favorite helmet is missing.

-Subayashi Hayato

A Machining Skin pilot candidate born in Japan. His rank is Chief Petty Officer, the same as A-Bao and Koo. In this space age where languages have become much less defined by borders compared to in the past, where people need to take an active approach when encountering others, those who lack the skills to communicate are called “Oldtypes.” As someone who has trouble expressing his emotions, Hayato too grew up hearing this taunt from his schoolmates. The reason he found himself attracted to Frau Bohr, who would become a childhood friend, was because she had the same kind of personality he did. However, she fell for A-Bao. From that moment on, Hayato would live his life like he was chasing after A-Bao.

-Kuzco Al

Original Four member No. 2. Of the Original Four she’s the closest to a normal person, but as a result she lacks specialized skills, and is completely obedient to Lalah Sung due to an absolute fear of her. One of only a few people who knew A-Bao during his time at the Flanagan Institute. The two of them were reunited when she brought the wreckage of Wilbur aboard her personal ship. She falls in love with Bright Noah, but it’s by Bright’s hand that she’ll lose her life.

-Sayla Mass

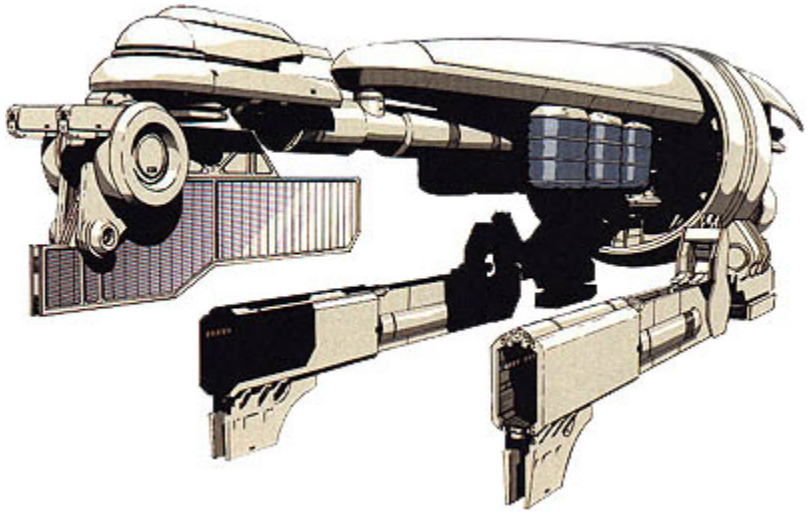
Radiating a light filled with confidence, she can be reviled by other women as a result. In particular, Frau Bohr ended up disembarking the *Pegasus* because of Sayla's presence. She's searching for a lost relative, but has not yet realized that the family member she's looking for and the person A-Bao sought out are one and the same. Nor has she yet to realize that person is Casval Bailey.

-Pilot Suit Chamber (Installation Room)

Broadly speaking, anyone operating a ship or fighter that utilizes the CORE control standard is fitted with a unique pilot suit. Unlike regular space suits, the specialized fibers used make them both resilient and unusually pliable, and they incorporate ultra-compact precision equipment into their structure for the ultimate in life support systems. The pilot suits designed to be used with Machining Skins have even higher performance, survivability and comfort than older versions, and the Gunboy series suits in particular use advanced, ultrathin materials, resulting in remarkable advancements in functionality et cetera. As a result, the cost per unit is also quite high, and it has many particular requirements when it comes to handling and storage. Special equipment is required to ensure that the suit forms a perfect fit with the pilot's body. The apparatus is very large due to the still early state of development, and a single installation room can only house three fitting machines. The entire room is painted in a uniform green to maintain the emotional and psychological health of the pilots.

In addition to communication equipment, the helmet also contains an oxygen recycler and the CPU which runs the life support system.

–*Pegasus* Catapult



The Machining Skins and machining workers (MS/MW) carried by the *Pegasus* are individually stored on the hull, inside of containers known as “blisters.” Each MS/MW is connected to a crane arm inside their blister, and when it is time to be deployed the crane moves them into position. First, the Gunboys and other offense-oriented units are carried to one of the flight decks on either side of the ship (which also serve as AMBAC arms). They are mounted to the deck, one at a time, and from there get loaded into the catapult launcher at its tip. The launch sequence is coordinated with each craft’s onboard systems and fired at the target, with the mega particle cannon providing support. Ultra high speed takeoffs are possible thanks to propulsion derived from the use of linear motors. Furthermore, craft such as the Mister Balls that provide offensive back-up and mothership defense are released directly into space via their crane arm.

-Ling A-Bao (Customized Pilot Suit)

The pilot suit version of A-Bao, which wasn't drawn until more than a year after the character was first designed. Surprisingly this is the first time we've shown it. The pilot suits designed for the model of humanoid space weapon chosen by the Earth Federation Forces see similar trial use with the Gunboy series, and are still being improved based on field data. That's the reason you see an evolution in the design (let's go with that). The helmet is a new, updated version compared to the one seen previously. The setting material will be published in the next issue.

-Char Azna Bull

Clones are multiple organisms that share the same genes. In that sense, monozygotic twins created from a single nucleus would also technically qualify as clones, but as the higher animals use sexual reproduction to pass on half the genes of the male and half the genes of the female, they aren't completely genetically identical. That's why the technique of creating more individuals without sexual reproduction is known as cloning, with various methods being researched, including embryo splitting and nuclear transplantation. The Char clones are "beings with other artificial objects added to or incorporated within their bodies"; they are classified as cyborg clones. They have no individual differences, as all data is shared between them.

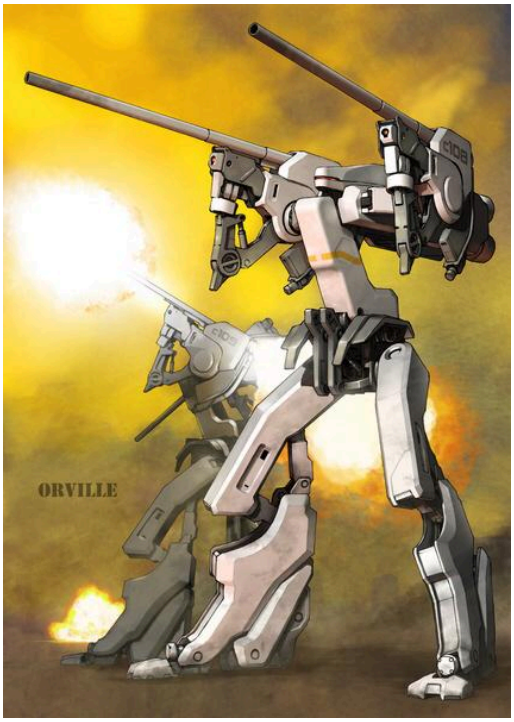
-L-MESS and Bit

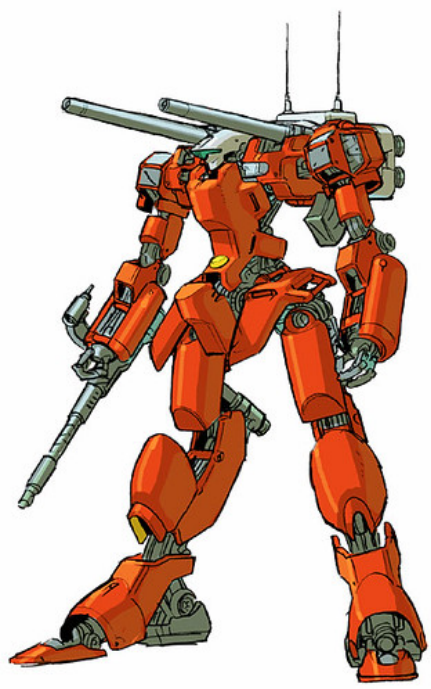
The Streamer-use experimental weapon L-MESS uses its entire structure as an antenna for the Psy-commu System, acting as a carrier ship capable of sending its Psy-commu "Bits" to attack from all directions. A portrait of the L-MESS was also shown in the January issue, but since the bits were not visible from the front, we're publishing a look at the underside this time. Comparing it against the silhouette of the D.D. (Space-type legs equipped) should give you an idea of the abnormal size of the craft and its weapons.

-Kuzco Al:

The latest model of pilot suits worn by the Original Four are different from other AEUG pilot suits, developed for use with the L-MESS series and based on the type adopted by the EFF. When commanding a battleship, she uses it as underwear worn with a jacket over top, as shown in an earlier illustration, and when sortieing in the L-MESS it's worn by itself. By the way, "Pegasus" is the name of the type of rose Kuzco is holding. It's a multifloral cultivar, durable and not requiring a lot of care.

-Gunboy Wilbur, Orville and Lorin





The Gump was the ultimate humanoid robot for the Space Age, of which only a single model was built, designed as a technical showcase and to prove the

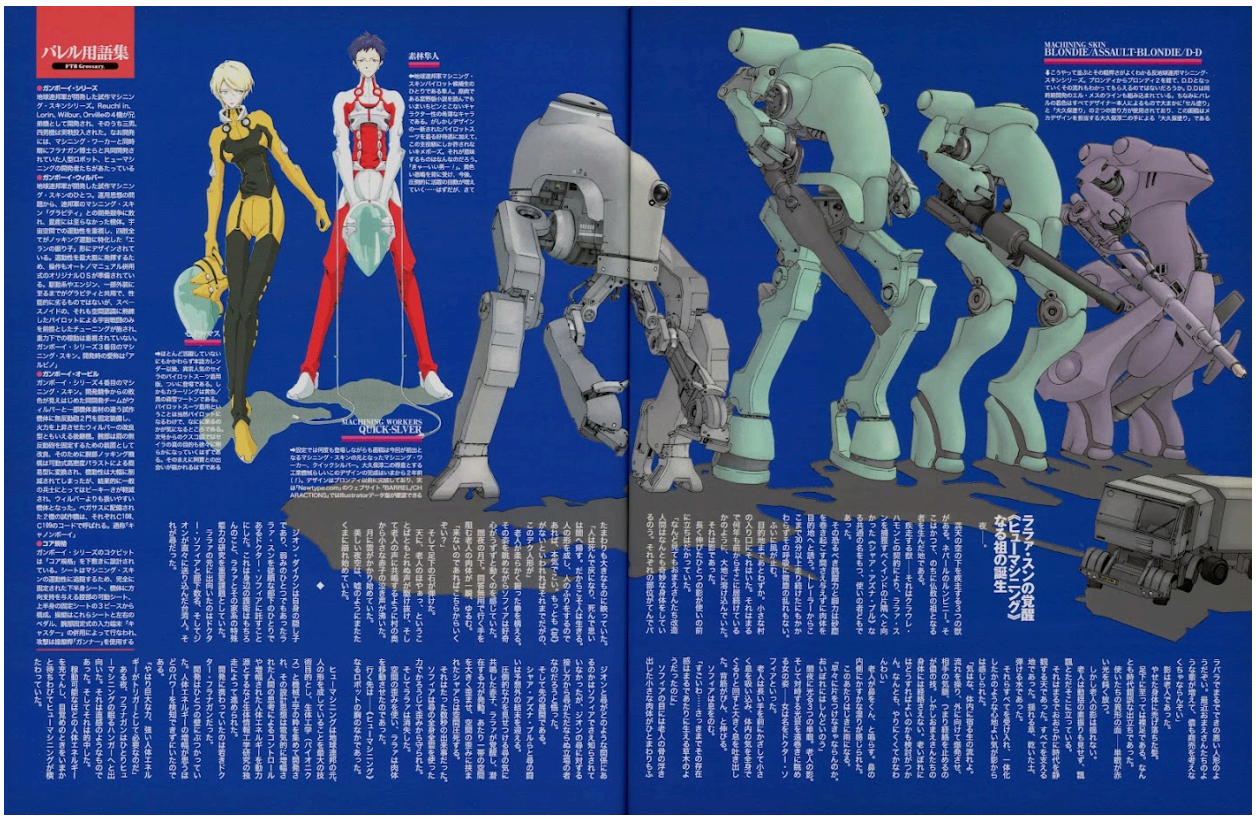
effectiveness of "the human body as a device for movement." After the completion of this "Humachining Project" much of its data was inherited by the Federation for use in its Machining Skin Project, part of which consisted of the Gunboy series. Although too temperamental a machine to be adopted into official use, four varieties of sister model were ultimately created, named for the Wright siblings. Shown here from the left you have the Wilburs, after the third son, and Orville, after the youngest.

-Gunboy Orville and the Core Block System

Orville, fourth in the line of the Gunboy series of Machining Skins, uses a cockpit designed around the CORE standard, just like Wilbur, and fundamentally the two are the same. The seat is made up of three pieces: a fixed section for the lower body to allow the pilot to keep up with the machine's mobility, a movable section for the hips and buttocks that provides directional control of the craft, and another fixed section for the upper body. Pedals on the left and right sides of the seat are used for flight control, and a terminal within arm's reach called the "Caster" is used in conjunction with the control stick called the "Gunner" to attack. However, as the nickname of "Cannonboy" would indicate, the Orville is equipped with two mounted recoilless rifles, and application programs for their use, as well as an additional Gunner are available as options.

-The *Pegasus* Crew: The *Pegasus* is a ship where civilians and laid-back soldiers who ignore even basic military discipline share their home. The presence of the Anti-Earth Union Group, and even the war itself feels somehow disconnected from reality to them. However, moving the world forward until they finally present you with this tale's two conclusions is the role they have to play. The fifteen members of the *Pegasus*' crew drift along, each one of them keeping their own desires a secret. (From left to right: Bright Noah, "Slugger" Law, Frau Bohr, Ling A-Bao and Koo "YC" Deng)

-Assault Blondie (Blondie 2)



An improved machining skin, made by taking the prototype Blondie, which was designed as a destructive mobile weapon based on the construction worker Quicksilver, and further applying real world combat data.

The installation of the newly developed joint drive generators have greatly increased the performance of each limb. The establishment of armor development technologies have allowed for nearly the entire frame to be covered, which adds to its sleeker look.

This machine is also referred to as the Blondie 2.

–*Musai*-class Light Cruiser

好評連載!! 新感覚ビジュアル・ストーリー!!
阿賽を襲う敵の正体は? いま世界が加速する!!

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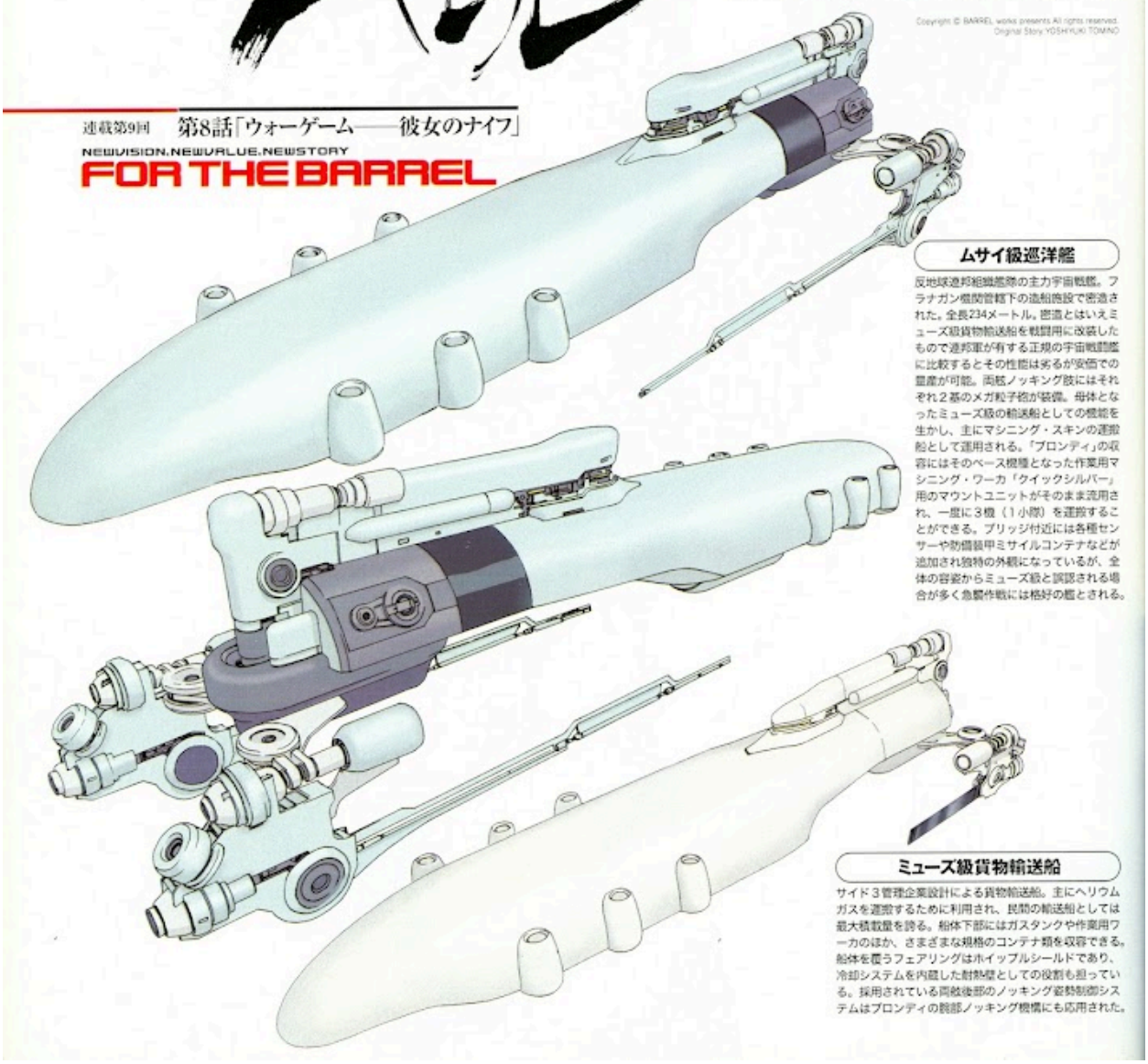
Original Story YOSHIYUKI TOMINO

連載第9回　第8話「ウォーゲーム——彼女のナイフ」

NEWVISION.NEWVALUE.NEWSTORY
FOR THE BARREL



ムサイ級巡洋艦

反地球連邦組織艦隊の主力宇宙戦艦。フラナガン機関管轄下の造船施設で密造された。全長234メートル。密造とはいえミューズ級貨物輸送船を戦闘用に改装したもので連邦軍が有する正規の宇宙戦闘艦に比較するとその性能は劣るが安価での量産が可能。両舷ノッキング肢にはそれぞれ2基のメガ粒子砲が装備。母体となったミューズ級の輸送船としての機能を生かし、主にマシニング・スキンの運搬船として運用される。「ブロンディ」の収容にはそのベース機種となった作業用マシニング・ワーカ「クイックシルバー」用のマウントユニットがそのまま流用され、一度に3機（1小隊）を運搬することができる。ブリッジ付近には各種センサーや防御装甲ミサイルコンテナなどが追加され独特の外観になっているが、全体の容姿からミューズ級と誤認される場合が多く急襲作戦には格好の艦とされる。

ミューズ級貨物輸送船

サイド3管理企業設計による貨物輸送船。主にヘリウムガスを運搬するために利用され、民間の輸送船としては最大積載量を誇る。船体下部にはガスタンクや作業用ワーカのほか、さまざまな規格のコンテナ類を収容できる。船体を覆うフェアリングはホイップルシールドであり、冷却システムを内蔵した耐熱壁としての役割も担っている。採用されている両舷後部のノッキング姿勢制御システムはブロンディの腕部ノッキング機構にも応用された。

The primary battleships of the Anti-Earth Union Group, constructed in secret at a shipyard under the control of the Flanagan Institute. Total length: 234 meters. “Constructed” is a bit of a misnomer, as these are *Muse*-class cargo ships that have been refitted for combat use, and although inferior when compared to the purpose-built battleships of the Earth Federation, they have the advantage of being able to be mass produced at a low cost. Primarily used as machining skin transports, a single *Musai*-class cruiser can carry three Blondies (one platoon). There are many aspects of its overall appearance that lead to it often being misidentified as a *Muse*-class, making it an ideal platform to carry out surprise attacks.

-Elan’s Pendulum: Named for the physicist who discovered it in the early period of the Universal Century, this term refers to both the weight distribution that allows for effective control of the action and reaction of mass transfer, and the formula for calculating it. Elan’s Pendulum was originally the name given to the special mercury-filled plate used as a demonstrative proof, and even in the present day the formula is still widely used for knocking propelled machines.

-Aura Road: The pride of Side 3, a saucer shaped construction with a circumference of eighteen kilometers. Built using the inner walls of a space colony. The outer perimeter houses a large-scale particle accelerator, while the inner perimeter functions as a synchrotron radiation generator. The latter can also be used to investigate the status of the particle accelerator. It was the first accelerator to use I-Field technology within its structure and barrier, and various discoveries were made thanks to it, including Minovsky particles. Plenty of other particle accelerators with an Ionesco barrier have been built ever since subcritical crystals made from an Oval core (a substance that causes electromagnetic disturbances) became industrially produced, but this is the only one to exist on such a scale.

-Ionesco Barrier: The method of generating a heavy electromagnetic field, as observed by Professor Ionesco. By using newly developed electromagnetic steel plates, multiple magnetic fields can be combined into a single powerful and

wide ranging field capable of stably containing plasma at a temperature of hundreds of millions of degrees. Professor Ionesco was able to personally create a nuclear reactor using this method, but the Ionesco barrier saw use in a number of other technical applications as well, and as I-Field technology it would go on to have a major impact on technological innovations to come.

-Fusion Batteries and Beam Batteries: An Oval core crystal right before reaching fusion, formed into a cartridge. The shell of a Minovsky-Ionesco reactor core is used as the cartridge casing, and by replacing the core it's possible to use the reactor repeatedly. After its conversion into a cartridge the reactor shell is known as a fusion battery. With fusion batteries, the miniaturization of Minovsky reactors was accelerated, even reaching a size that could be installed aboard a machining worker. E-CAP technology, commonly known as beam batteries, was developed through the application of fusion batteries, and focused not on using the reactor as a source of electricity but as a source of plasma generation that could function as a weapon. In an E-CAP, a laser is injected into a pre-fusion Oval core crystal housed within a cartridge, triggering an implosion that forms mega particles. In this event there is no fusion chain, and the crystal is converted entirely into heat during the degeneration. The realization of this technology allowed for the miniaturization of mega particle cannons and made portable, machining skin-use beam weapons possible.

-Ling A-Bao

A congenital abnormality, born into this world as a “cursed child.” For A-Bao, there can be no doubt that death waits at the end of his journey. Tormented by his own unstable value system, which changes from day to day, and at the mercy of the sexuality that’s taken root within him, he takes a calm look at the difference between who he is now and his destination. And he works to bridge that gap. If he was following the path of a normal boy, A-Bao was also experiencing the suffering that came the middle of adolescence. Even if he had the ability to see the future, his heart was still immature. That’s why he panics, and rushes. All because he has seen his life, albeit only in fragments, before it has happened. The boy, who can’t even understand his own abilities, is terrified by the difference between his present self and the person he sees glimpses of from the future. “Am I really human? Maybe I’m actually…” Faced with those kinds of thoughts, A-Bao leaves the ship where his friends are and wanders the Earth alone. His mouth is stained with alcohol and other kinds of filth. The pain of being hit, the scalding heat of flesh. The taste of sand fills his mouth. Many people and stories still await him.

Although he will eventually become known as “The White Speed” due to his skill piloting a machining skin, A-Bao still has countless ordeals to face before he reaches that point. Even with the special powers of a Streamer, his physical body is that of a teenager’s. Realizing that, he is able to overcome his many trials, and at that moment his solitary wandering comes to an end. It was the same journey that Packdelia III had taken to see more of the world, once upon a time. Meeting new people, learning about himself, A-Bao finally returns to the ship. Even though he knows that doing so means returning to the battlefield, he still sets off once again, leaving the Earth behind him.

-Kuzco Al

Original Four member No. 2. A female soldier who is more easily recognized for her first class beauty. As each of the Original Four possesses a ship built to their own specifications, she is shown here in her captain's uniform. It's been made-to-order, of course. Following the conclusion of the compilation chapters (starting with the issue after next, in other words), For the Barrel enters the Kuzco Al arc. Meeting A-Bao, the details of her past and then… She will fall in love with Bright Noah, and the story of their encounter will be quietly told as it heads towards its tragic end.

-Doctor Flanagan

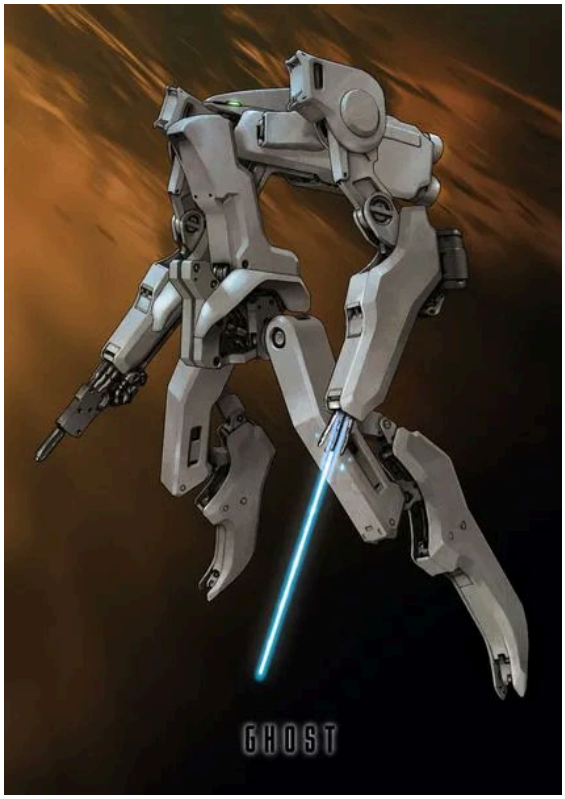
Also goes by the name Dr. Hell, the man who discovered the Mechanical Beasts on Bardos Island and awoke to dreams of world domination—no. None of that is true.

He is a researcher in the field of bioinformatics and the father of the Original Four. Despite his sharp mind he is a vulgar and worldly man, and he has lived far detached from anything that could be viewed as success. He's somewhere around 70 years old. However, finding Lalah Sung was a turning point in his life.

"Brocken! Take the Mechanical Beast Garada K7 and annihilate the enemy!"

"Haha, as you wish, Dr. Hell!"

-G3



A new Federation machining skin to replace the destroyed Wilbur. It features various improvements, such as the removal of the core block, an increase in the store of internal propellant, additional armor over the chest and a new type of enhanced linear drive used for the powertrain. A Streamer-use bio scanner has also been added as well. The name G3 comes from the Federation's ordnance classification system (weapons grade), because it's the first Rank 3 machining skin (battleship class). Nicknamed "Ghost." It was A-Bao's personal unit, but later on it would be used by Casval Bailey.

-AEUG Infantry Soldiers

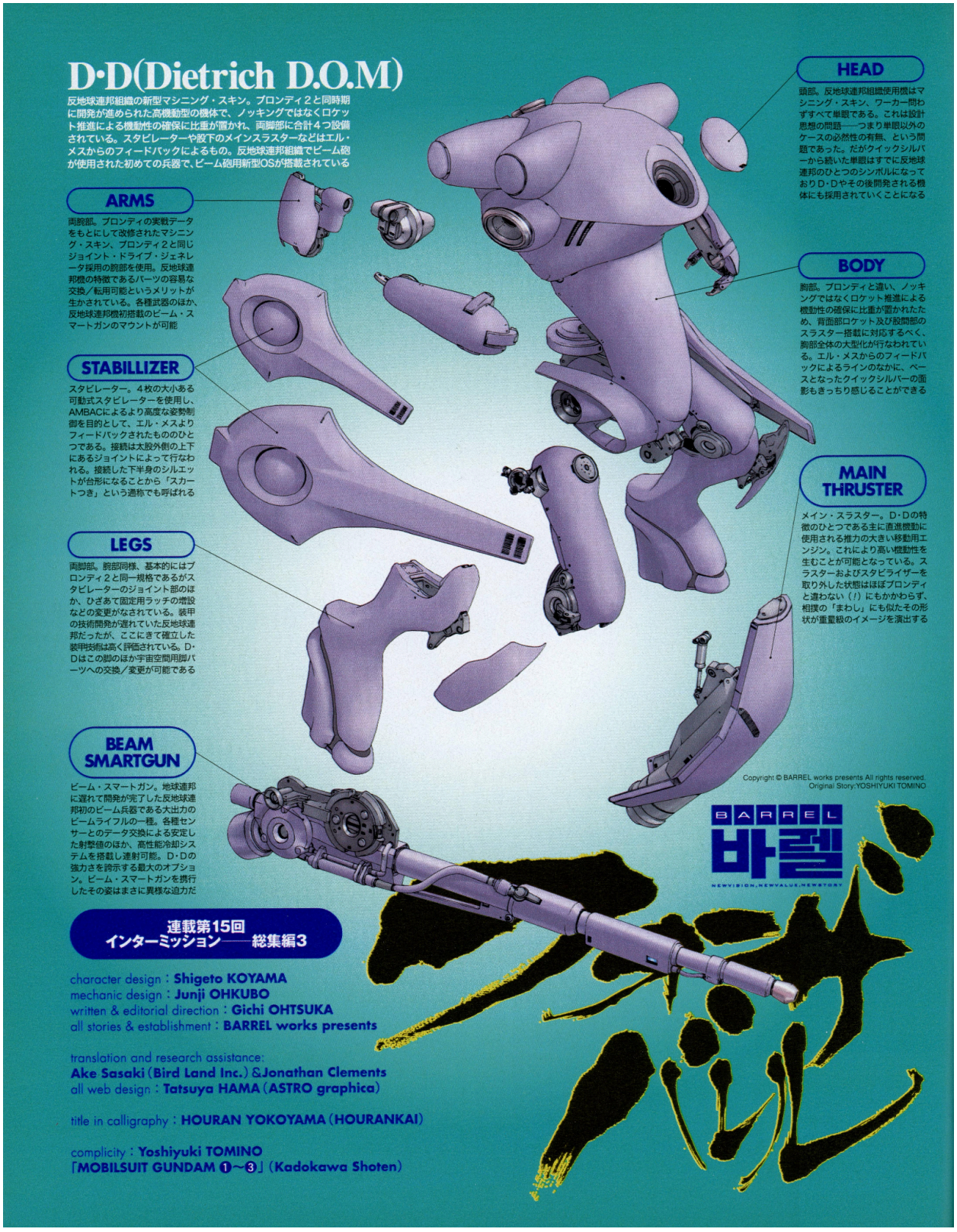
Under the backing of the Packdelia Foundation, non-Federation member states, and other financial supporters hoping for war, the Anti-Earth Union Group builds its strength, becoming more and more militarized. This is evident in the

armament of its foot soldiers, which are still an effective means of territory occupation and control, even in the age of Machining Skins. A wide variety of infantry-use equipment and weaponry is available depending on the situation and mission objectives.

-AEUG Pilots

Out of the AEUG pilots, only the best of the best are given the opportunity to wear a machining skin pilot suit. In addition to a protective gel layer designed to alleviate the harsh effects of piloting a machining skin on the body, it also comes equipped with a reserve oxygen supply and a minimum level of emergency features. This design uses the general purpose Federation suit shown worn by Ram Dowai on the front page of Issue 10 as its base. The mark on the shoulder essentially indicates as much.

D·D (Dietrich D.O.M.)



The Anti-Earth Union Group's new model of machining skin. A high mobility machine developed in conjunction with the Blondie 2, it achieves its maneuverability through jet propulsion, not knocking, and it has a total of four rockets mounted to its legs. The stabilators and main thruster on the undercarriage are a result of feedback from the L-MESS. It's the first AEUG machine to use a beam cannon, and it has a new OS installed specifically for this purpose.

-Head

Whether machining skins or machining workers, all of the machines in use by the AEUG have a single eye. This was an issue of design philosophy—in other words, it was questioned whether there would be instances that necessitated a design other than monocular, but by that point the monoeye inherited from the Quicksilver had already been adopted into the D.D and later AEUG craft.

-Body

Because the D.D's maneuverability comes from jet propulsion and not knocking, unlike the Blondie, the entire torso has been enlarged to accommodate the installation of the back mounted rockets and crotch thruster. The body lines are a result of lessons learned from the L-MESS, but you can still clearly see traces of the Quicksilver that served as the blueprint.

-Main Thruster

One of the D.D's trademarks is a powerful thrust engine, used primarily for straight line maneuverability. It's from this engine that the machining skin gets its high mobility. Despite the fact that the D.D really doesn't look very different(!) compared to the Blondie once its thruster and stabilizers have been removed, the shape of the thruster, resembling a sumo wrestler's loincloth, gives it the image of a heavyweight.

-Arms

Uses the same joint drive generator in its arms as the Blondie 2, the improved machining skin based on the Blondie's real world battle data. The advantages of a major AEUG characteristic, easily replaceable and upgradable components, can be seen at work here. In addition to other weapons, it's the first AEUG machine capable of carrying a beam smart gun.

-Stabilizer

Uses two sets of large and small stabilators to provide a finer degree of attitude control than is possible with AMBAC, a design that came from the L-MESS. These are connected by joints above and below the outer thigh. The attached stabilators give its lower body a trapezoidal silhouette, which has led to people nicknaming it "skirt wearer."

-Legs

Like the arms, the legs are essentially the same as the ones used for the Blondie 2, but with the addition of joints for the stabilators and latches to connect the knee pads. Although the AEUG had lagged behind when it came to armor development, the technologies established here are highly rated. It can also replace/swap out these legs for other space-use ones.

-Beam Smart Gun

After the Earth Federation was the first to develop beam weaponry, the AEUG completed its own in the form of this high-powered beam rifle. By exchanging data between multiple sensors it maintains stable target information, and an advanced cooling system allows for continuous fire. It's the greatest accessory for showing off the D.D's might. The machine carrying this smart gun truly wields an uncanny power.

Lining them up like this, it's easy to see the ferocity of the AEUG's machining skin series. You can see how the Blondie progressed into the Blondie 2, and then the D.D, right? And then the D.D also incorporates the lineage of the L-MESS, developed around the same time. By the way, all of the coloring in "For the Barrel" is handled by the main designers, and broadly speaking follows one of two styles: cel-shaded and "Okubo-shaded." These images are the latter, drawn by mechanical designer Okubo Junji.

There are actually two variants of this machine, although their outside appearance is virtually identical. The first uses a new operating system compatible with portable beam weaponry (the Direct Open Maximum OS), while the second type (the B2) uses a modified version of the Blondie 2 OS and uses the Assault-Blondie cannon.

-The Original Four

A name given to the group of four superhumans consisting of Ling A-Bao and three other soldiers from the AEUG, whose high ESP values led to Packdelia VII selecting them for reinforcement at Flanagan's laboratory (From left: Cramble Karela, Challia Bull and Kuzco Al). However, A-Bao was never formally registered as one of Flanagan's subjects, and Lalah Sung, who would join them later, took his place as an official member of the team (Pictured at center). Each of them possesses a ship built to his or her own specifications, as well as the authority to act autonomously.

-Gravity and Ball

The other side to the Federation Forces' Machining Skin Project was the GM series (Gladiator Machining skin), which would be adopted by the Federation after the results of the design competition with the Gunboy series MS. At present, the Gravity is the only model of the GM series. Incidentally, the

Blondies used against the Federation were developed independently by the manufacturer of the Quicksilver, based off of stolen information on the GM provided by the AEUG.

-Gene Drivers (Casval Bailey and Leroy Gilliam)

Casval, the sixteenth member of the *Pegasus* crew and the true main character of this story, and Leroy, the "faceless young soldier" that kills A-Bao. Casval's encounter with A-Bao, and Leroy's killing of him are not coincidences either. The boys' roles will be understood the moment the case hanging from Casval's neck is opened. Two out of the five boys and girls known as Gene Drivers, they are pawns of a prearranged destiny, just like A-Bao. As "gene couriers"…

-Hayato Subayashi

One of the Earth Federation Forces' machining skin pilot candidates. Even if you've read the original text of the Tomino novels, he's a character lacking characterization; someone who doesn't really leave an impression. However, not only does he get preferential treatment by appearing here in the newly designed pilot suit, his heroic stance is one that would be reserved for no one but the main character. What could this mean? "Oh my god, what a hunk!" With the shrill screams following him, the number of his future exploits will definitely see a sharp increase…well, they should but—we'll see…

-Sayla Mass

Despite not really doing much ever since her appearance in this publication's calendar, we finally get a look at the oddly popular Sayla Mass in her pilot suit. On top of that, she's got Yuki Mori's yellow and black two-tone color scheme. Obviously, wearing a pilot suit means being a pilot, so what could her machine be? Starting with the next issue, Sayla's true objectives will gradually come to light during the Kuzco Arc. Her encounter with A-Bao will likely be shown before that.

Also known by the name of Artesia Som Deikun. Everyone already knows this, but she's Zeon Deikun's daughter. She began to go by Sayla after being left with the Mass family. She had an older brother, but he's already passed away, and she's currently searching for the last blood relative she has left. She's willing to sleep with anyone to reach her objective. Meeting A-Bao and the other members of the *Pegasus* crew will bring about a particular change in her. Later on, she'll contract cosmic radiation sickness. A gal with some real tig bitties. Some real tig bitties…

-Machining Workers QUICK-SILVER

Although it's been mentioned many times in the setting already, this is the first time we've published a drawing of the Quicksilver, the machining worker which formed the basis for the machining skins. It was two years ago(!) that Okubo Junji came up with this design, which exemplifies his knack for construction machinery. It was completed before the Blondie, and you can actually view the Illustrator data via *Newtype.com*'s BARREL/CHARACTIONS webpage.

–Gunboy Series: The experimental line of machining skins developed by the Earth Federation Forces. Reuchlin, Lorin, Wilbur and Orville were the four sibling machines planned, and from out of those the units bearing the names of the third and fourth sons were the ones to reach actual combat. Furthermore, the development of the humanoid robot for the Humachining Project was carried out by Professor Flanagan and his colleagues during the same period of time the machining workers were being created.

–Gunboy Wilbur: One of the EFF's prototype machining skins. Due to problems related to operational doctrine it was passed over in the competition with the EFF's "Gravity" machining skin and never entered mass production. It emphasizes mobility in outer space, with each of its four limbs utilizing Elan's Pendulum, a unique shape specially suited to knocking movement. In order to maximize its maneuverability, it has been equipped with an original operating system that runs during both automated and manual control modes. It shares its drivetrain, engine, and even parts of its exterior with the Gravity, and while the Wilbur isn't inferior in terms of performance, it's been entirely tuned with Spacenoids in mind, or at least pilots with highly developed spatial awareness, with no concern given to how it performs under gravity. The number three machine of the Gunboy series. Affectionately called "Albino" during its development.

–Gunboy Orville: The fourth machining skin built in the Gunboy series. When the development team first started to see signs that they were falling behind in the competition, they took a test frame with some material differences from Wilbur's and equipped it with two recoilless rifles. Orville can be thought of as a successor machine, improving Wilbur's design and raising its firepower. The shoulders have been strengthened in order to mount its guns. To accommodate the change, the knocking function in the arms has been swapped out for high-density, articulated ballast, and while this greatly diminishes overall mobility, the result is that regular pilots have found the wilder aspects of Wilbur to be tamed, making for an easier machine to handle. The two prototypes carried by the *Pegasus* are referred to by their respective identification codes, C108 and C109. Orville's nickname is "Cannonboy."

–CORE Standard: The cockpits of the Gunboy series are designed in accordance with the CORE standard. In order for the pilot to keep up with the machining skin's mobility, the seat is made up of three pieces: a fixed section for the lower body, a movable section for the hips and buttocks that provides directional control for the machine, and another fixed section for the upper body. The seat is moved in combination with left and right side pedals for flight control, and an arm mounted terminal called the "Caster" is used with a control stick called the "Gunner" to attack.

-Packdelia

The young king of the Packdelia Foundation. Also known as Packdelia Seven (VII). It was an enduring dream of the family to discover superpowers within their lineage, as it was a superpower that first transformed them into oil tycoons.

Finally, an Esper was born in the seventh generation, and to mark the occasion he was christened with the same given name as his surname. By the way, the coloring was done by character designer Koyama Shigeto, both this time and previously.

All of it is digitally colored, but painted in a style commonly referred to as cel shading. However, what in the world is that giant mecha frisbee? …That is For the Barrel's greatest mystery.

Enormous Cylindrical Stuctures Floating in Space: An Explanation of Colonies

The enormous drain on natural resources required for industrialization and a burgeoning population, along with the buildup of hazardous waste matter that accompanied those changes drove the Earth's ecosystem into crisis. As a result, humanity began its expansion into space in order to secure a new habitat. The key element of this plan established artificial land masses in space—"Space Colonies". These were designed with the prerequisite of guaranteeing a habitat that was no different from Earth, being mostly automated while providing absolute stability out in space. However, when resettlement began there were quite a few people voicing their suspicions regarding the risks of leaving Earth, especially as far as "absolute stability" was concerned.

With a diameter of 3 km and a total length of 32 km the enormous cylinder shaped colonies provide a sealed environment, with a single one able to support slightly over 100,000 residents. Emigration from Earth continues to move into clusters of colonies placed at various Lagrange points. These clusters are organized into economic blocs of 40 colonies called "Sides", which are then broken into groups of nationalized "States", made up of one to nine colonies. A single colony in every State is established as a "Bunch", which handles administrative duties (in cases of a single colony State the term still applies). Ever since the establishment of Side 3, independent nations have been gaining more and more influence within the Federation Assembly based on their number of colonies, and as a result countries wishing to strengthen their influence began to turn to the ignominious method of compulsory space immigration. Even putting this aside, the problems related to immigration appear to be endless.

APPENDIX A - WORLD ENDING BARREL SUPPLEMENTS (#1-#8)

[EDITOR'S NOTE #1: This collection does not have WEB #5 Slugger Law in it]
[EDITOR'S NOTE #2: WEB #10 Sayla Mass was never able to be created, more notes on this in WEB #10 Ling A-Bao 2]

WORLD END BARREL #1 - #8 (WEB)

APPENDIX B - For The Barrel “1984” (#1-#4)

For the Barrel "1984" Chapter 1
For the Barrel "1984" Chapter 2
For The Barrel "1984" Chapter 3
For The Barrel "1984" #4 - Imgur